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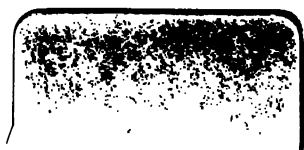
DUFFYSHARDY



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# FOR THE OLD LOVE'S SAKE.

## A Story.

BY

IZA DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "GLENCAIRN," ETC.



LONDON:

A. H. MOXON, 21 PATERNOSTER ROW.

1877.

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# FOR THE OLD LOVE'S SAKE!

## CHAPTER I.

### RETROSPECTIVE.

When we were girl and boy together  
We tossed about the flowers,  
And wreathed the blushing hours,  
Into a posy green and sweet.  
Fate and darkling grave kind dreams do cheat,  
That while fair life, young hope, despair and death are,  
We're boy and girl, and lass and lad, and man and  
wife together !—*Beddoes.*



THE Atherdales of Inkermann Villa were six in family, according to the custom (in some cases a custom only existing in theory, but with the Atherdales carried out in practice), of counting the governess as one of the family.

But, excluding Mrs. Cleve from this privilege, it was only a family of five ; and amongst these five the male element was solely represented by the eldest and

only son of the house ; and whenever he was away from home, Inkermann Villa, not boasting of a manservant, nor even of a boy in buttons, was a purely feminine household.

The quiet and peaceable, not to say commonplace, appearance, of the villa, was perhaps not quite in keeping with the name suggestive of martial glory which had been bestowed on it, and painted large-lettered on its gateposts after the Crimean campaign. It was in a neighbourhood called by the City and the West-end "the suburbs," but regarded by most of its inhabitants as being "quite in London." It combined the advantages of a cabstand and a High Street close by, with that of a small slip of garden in the front and a larger one in the rear ; and without being an especially handsome house, it was a very happy home. Mrs. Atherdale had lived there for some years ; she was a widow, and for the benefit of her three young daughters, she added to their household circle a governess, Mrs. Cleve, a widow also, but a young and pretty widow. Indeed, Mrs. Atherdale, when she first saw her new governess, had felt half inclined to draw back from the negotiations which she had commenced ; for warning stories of sons who had fallen in love with attractive governesses crossed her mind, and Alfred was no longer a boy, and Mrs. Cleve undeniably pretty and youthful-looking, although some years his senior.

However, two or three years had passed away since

Mrs. Cleve and Alfred Atherdale had been fellow-inmates of one home, and the dreaded danger had long ago ceased to disturb or even to flit across the maternal mind of Mrs. Atherdale. Neither her dear son nor her governess showed or felt the smallest inclination to succumb to each other's attractions; no boyish attachment or womanly coquetry had ever troubled the household peace. Although, as has been observed, it was only a family circle of six, two young people, nephew and niece by marriage of the lady of the house, were so much more frequently at Inker-mann Villa than away from it, that it might almost have been called a family of eight.

One afternoon in the beginning of the month of May, the Atherdale children and their two cousins had gone on an excursion to the Zoological Gardens. Mrs. Atherdale and her governess, while awaiting the return of the young people to tea, were sitting on the sofa empty handed, doing nothing.

Mrs. Atherdale was of a busy and energetic nature, and the appearance of idleness did not suit her; she stirred, fidgeted, and her silk dress rustled as she changed her attitude, and illustrated her conversation by accompanying it with appropriate action. But Ina Cleve looked well doing nothing, and sat still as a picture, with a reposeful grace about her—black-robed, pale-featured, drooping-eyelashed, like a fair grave saint or madonna. They were talking about the two young cousins before mentioned, who had been born

and bred in America, and had only lived some six or eight months in England.

"I cannot understand why they persist in such an imprudent course, when they know I should so gladly take them in and make them at home," said Mrs. Atherdale. "There's the spare room ; and we could easily make up a bed for Christine. It is so odd for an orphan boy and girl to like living alone in little poky lodgings, and poor Christine must find it so solitary."

"She seems quite happy and content, and to all appearances, strange as it may be, they somehow get on very well," observed Mrs. Cleve.

"Their landlady must cheat them right and left," said Mrs. Atherdale.

"Perhaps she may put a few shillings on to their weekly bills ; but she seems on the whole a nice motherly sort of person ; and Christine, though such a child, is careful : and Carlos has a good store of common sense."

"Do you think so, my dear?" responded Mrs. Atherdale. "He is a dear good boy, but so thoroughly boyish. My Alfred at his age, you remember, was just the same as he is now, as thoughtful and as clever. Carlos is close upon nineteen, you know."

"He has a great many simple boyish ways, but plenty of manliness and energy in action, ready whenever it is needed," remarked the governess.

"That is exactly the description of his father, five and twenty years ago!" said Mrs. Atherdale. "The Emperor Charlemagne, as we used to call him in fun. Ah, my dear! to look round at all these children growing up into men and women, makes me sad sometimes. I remember as if it were yesterday, the old home—Saxby Towers—and the three brothers, my dear husband—only he was not my husband, nor even engaged to me then—and Carlos and Geoffrey. I can see them now, as they used to race their three horses round the grounds, all laughing and shouting. I would be looking on, half-frightened, for I was a timid girl, and yet admiring them all, and my Edwin the most of all. Then they would all gallop up to me, and call for a prize for the victor. I recollect so well giving a laurel-wreath to Geoffrey, and a rose from my hair to Edwin, and Carlos laughed about being 'left out in the cold.' Poor Emperor Charlemagne! now here is his son grown up as tall as he! And then poor Geoffrey! I wonder where he is now. I think very few men's lives are so blighted by an early disappointment as Geoffrey's was."

"I can hardly fancy that his wild wandering way of life is attributable to that, so much as to a natural taste for roving," observed Mrs. Cleve. "I should not imagine that he had devoted his life to a memory. Very few women do that, and still fewer men."

"My dear," said Mrs. Atherdale, looking at her governess curiously, "more women, and men too, do

it, than you think for. You don't seem to believe in human nature."

"I think I believe the very best of human nature," answered Mrs. Cleve; "but does it seem to you, dear Mrs. Atherdale, the *best*, to believe that every wound is incurable, and that any one human creature must live lonely for ever here, because one other has been called away to a happier life?"

"That is true after all, my dear. I have heard my Alfred say something very like that. Alfred generally takes a broad, right view of things," said the mother. "He is clever like his father. The flower of the flock, for cleverness, my Edwin was. As far as personal appearance went, the Atherdales were such a handsome family, I think there was not a pin to choose between them. You were so young at the time of your poor sister's death, my dear, I suppose you never saw any of them?"

"Not that I remember," replied Mrs. Cleve. "I doubt whether I should even remember Viola if I had not her portrait. Though I recollect clearly how I ran out in the garden late one evening, the evening of her death, not knowing what had happened. I saw the men who brought her home coming—they were carrying something on a sort of litter—and my nurse came and called me in. That is all I remember, and that one thing I shall never forget! All my other childish memories of that time are in a sort of mist. Even of Viola, except of her bright hair and

her white dresses, I have very little recollection. And I cannot recall Mr. Geoffrey Atherdale at all."

Mrs. Atherdale took up, from a table near, an oval morocco case containing a beautifully executed miniature of a young girl, and looked at it.

"Very lovely, poor girl, she was. Sad—sad," she remarked, vaguely. "Geoffrey used to be so handsome, too! What a beautiful couple they would have been! My dear," she added, putting the portrait down, and dropping the subject also, as the clock struck, "are not those children late? Just ring and tell Sarah she had better get the tea ready. I'll go up and bring Alfred down."

Mrs. Atherdale departed to look after her son, who was in his study, reading or writing. Alfred had no especial business: he was at the bar, but had not yet held a brief, and did not seem likely to do so. He wrote articles for magazines, and intended to write a great book some day. Meanwhile he did not incline to any hard-working post; he had when a boy been in delicate health, and was not now robustly strong. Besides, he had vague "expectations"—possibilities of his absent uncle Geoffrey's "doing something for him some day." While Mrs. Atherdale was tempting Alfred from his study by the promise of tea, Ina Cleve sat looking at the portrait of her sister, and pondering over many things in a dreamy tranquil way.

The history of the Atherdales was well known to her; there was a link, though but a frail one—a link

of sentiment, not of kindred—connecting their family with hers.

Once upon a time, that is many years ago, when the estate of Saxby Towers was purchased by Mr. Atherdale (father-in-law of the present Mrs. Atherdale of Inkermann Villa), he had, like most of the kings in fairy stories, three sons. He was left a widower while the boys were yet children, and three pretty children they were then ; each about a fraction taller than the other, like three very shallow steps ; for Geoffrey was only a year older than Edwin, and Edwin barely a year and a half the senior of Carlos. Their mother had been a Spanish-American lady of brilliant brunette beauty ; and although two of the boys had inherited the blonde hair and light eyes of their father, they all three equally resembled their mother in style of features, personal attractions, high spirits, and wilful and wandering dispositions. The nature of Dolores Ximenez was in them all, fair haired Atherdales though they were. They grew up together the plagues, the pets, the torments, and the delights of their near neighbours and friends. But the neighbourhood of Saxby Towers did not keep them long. When Geoffrey was twenty-one he and Carlos went off to America ; and soon after that Edwin made a runaway match with the pretty, penniless girl, a distant cousin, who had watched the brothers riding races round the grounds. Carlos started for America under the natural impulse of a roving and adventurous disposition, which a quiet

stately home could not hold in check. This impulse was probably strengthened by a brotherly inclination to accompany Geoffrey ; for between these two, the eldest and the youngest brother, there was a strong attachment.

Geoffrey quitted his home and his country with the purpose of flying from a spot of tragic association, and seeking peace or forgetfulness in excitement and change. Young as he was when he left England, there was a tragedy in his life which drove him thence ; and the story of the tragedy ran briefly and simply enough as follows :—

A cottage near Saxby Towers was rented by a Mr. Dalziel, a man of whose life and character very little was known, but who was not held in very high repute in the neighbourhood. But whether he was scheming or adventurous, unscrupulous or untrustworthy, mattered little to Geoffrey Atherdale in comparison to the important fact that he was Viola Dalziel's father. Mr. Dalziel's family consisted of a pretty, gentle, quiet wife, his second choice, two or three little children, and, last, not least, his eldest child, and only daughter by his first wife, Viola Dalziel. She was a girl of striking beauty, a year younger than Geoffrey Atherdale in age, and five years older in heart. A girl who had lived a lifetime at seventeen, and at twenty looked upon the world of mankind with beautiful, scornful, blasé eyes ; understanding their weaknesses, playing with their strength, and vivisectioning their hearts for her

pleasure. She was alike brilliant and winning, charming and puzzling. Geoffrey Atherdale was madly in love with her ; Edwin and Carlos admired her sincerely ; even old Mr. Atherdale acknowledged her fascination, and was by slow degrees brought to admit to himself the possibility that, if nothing would cure Geoffrey's infatuation, he might some day be induced to yield a reluctant consent to the union of his son with Mr. Dalziel's daughter. But while seeing the possibility of such a day, Mr. Atherdale trusted heartily the day might never come.

It never did. There ran a river skirting the grounds of Saxby Towers, and across the river at one corner boundary of those grounds, had been thrown, by desire of a late proprietor, a picturesque, but narrow, and undefended arched wooden bridge, a favourite haunt of Viola Dalziel's. One evening she and Geoffrey met together near this spot, as they had done unnoticed several times before, to walk they cared not where, to linger for no reason, and whisper though there were no eavesdroppers near. This meeting was the last. An accident which more than once nervous people, crossing the slippery, uneven planks of the unguarded bridge, had prophesied, came to pass.

Geoffrey Atherdale saw Viola Dalziel fall, and flung himself into the river to save her or to share her fate. He could not save her ; he did not die with her. The river was rapid ; and although not at its widest there, was wide enough to render it difficult for a man em-

barrassed by the clasp of a drowning girl to reach the bank. The help that came too late for her, too soon for him, brought Geoffrey to the shore, holding Viola in his arms, both apparently lifeless. She never stirred or breathed again, in spite of all efforts and restoratives and medical treatment ; but he revived to life, although they feared for his reason for days after Viola's death. While yet the shock of the fatal accident was fresh in the minds of the neighbourhood, Geoffrey Atherdale, with his favourite brother Carlos, quitted Saxby, and sailed for America, craving for new scenes, new interests, new ways of life, to distract his mind from dwelling perpetually on that grave where half his life and all his youth lay buried.

When old Mr. Atherdale died some two or three years afterwards, his second son Edwin, whose runaway marriage had been the cause of a coolness that had passed away, but of no lasting quarrel, between father and son, was thus the only one at his bedside. The father's heart had always clung to his eldest-born, whose voluntary exile he regarded with regret ; and the estate of Saxby Towers, not being entailed, he bequeathed it to Geoffrey solely, with the larger share of his personal property ; the remainder of which was divided between Carlos and Edwin.

The news of their father's death did not reach Geoffrey and Carlos in the far west of America until the funeral at Saxby was long over, and the grass growing green and free over Mr. Atherdale's grave.

Neither of the wanderers returned to England on the news. One of them, Carlos, having in his impetuous way fallen an early victim to Transatlantic beauty, was on the point of marriage ; the other, though with no such romantic link to bind him, liked his new life too well to return to the old. He wrote instructions for Saxby Towers to be let. The place, he said, was hateful to him. For his brothers' sakes it should not be sold, but for himself he would never again cross its threshold. If Edwin chose to inhabit it, it was his at a merely nominal rent.

Edwin Atherdale, however, was not fond of accepting favours even from a brother ; he did not care much for Saxby country life himself, nor did his young wife care for their neighbours there ; and even at the lowest rent, the young couple thought the Towers would be a troublesome establishment to keep up. So Edwin and his wife went to live in London, and Saxby Towers was let to strangers, and seemed likely to remain, at all events until Geoffrey's death, in the occupancy of its present tenants.

Of Geoffrey Atherdale, saving occasional business communications, very little was heard in England ; and a yearly letter or so constituted his correspondence with Edwin. His letters, very affectionate and fraternal in tone, although few and far between, were dated now from East and now from West ; now from Mexico, then from California, and anon from Canada ; but about the manner and mode of his roving life he

wrote very little ; he had always been a brief letter writer. Carlos, although as laconic in his letters, always corresponded much more frequently with his family and friends. He settled for a few years in Colorado, and then on his wife's death moved down into Louisiana. He had a son and a daughter, named after their parents, Carlos and Christine. Edwin, living in England, also had a son and three daughters ; he fell ill of a lingering disease, and died when the youngest was three years old. The Atherdales were not a long lived family ; Carlos only survived his brother Edwin two years, and, dying suddenly of yellow fever during a trip to New Orleans, left his two children orphans. But Geoffrey, the eldest brother, wifeless and childless, lived on.

Thus the only remaining members of the Atherdale family were now these—Geoffrey, the self-exiled owner of Saxby Towers,—Mrs. Atherdale, widow of his second brother Edwin, her son Alfred and her three young daughters ; and lastly, Carlos and Christine, orphan children of Carlos, and representatives of the youngest branch of the family.

Mrs. Cleve had owed her position as governess at the Atherdales, at first, partly to the fact of her being Viola Dalziel's sister. There had been a large family of children by Mr. Dalziel's second marriage, two being born after the death of his eldest daughter ; indeed the pretty white cottage near Saxby had been quite a nursery garden of olive-branches. But of this large

family only two or three were living now ; the Dalziels had died off as the Atherdales had done, leaving but few branches to the once wide-spreading trees. Ina Dalziel had been a child of four years old when Viola was drowned, had grown up with a full share of the Dalziel beauty, had married early and been early left a widow. She was intelligent and accomplished, as well as gentle and sweet-tempered, and was happy in her position with the Atherdales ; there existed between her and them a mutual affection, which rendered her situation alike that of governess, companion, and friend.

Mrs. Atherdale came down with Alfred from his study, and wondered aloud why "those children" were not punctual ; but had only so wondered for about a minute when the garden gate was pushed open with a bang, and with a buzz of voices and laughter a merry troop ran past the window.

Mrs. Atherdale bustled hastily out into the hall to meet them ; Alfred did not rise from the sofa whereon he had thrown himself ; Mrs. Cleve, whose movements were generally leisurely and languid, and quite refreshingly placid to behold, followed Mrs. Atherdale quietly, with a pleased smile of welcome.





## CHAPTER II.

### INTRODUCTORY.

No fond peculiar grief  
Has ever touched or bud or leaf  
Of their unblighted spring.

—*Sydney Dobell.*

**T**HE young party just returned from the Gardens consisted of two girls of fifteen or sixteen, one blonde and the other brunette—two dark-haired children of eight or nine—and last, not least, guard and escort of the party, bringing up the rear, but towering a head above the tallest of the four girls, a large long-limbed young fellow, with an abundant crop of light curly hair.

This was Carlos Atherdale; the fair girl was his sister Christine; the three dark-haired girls were Mrs. Atherdale's daughters, Dora, Letty, and Lizzie. There was a likeness, and yet a marked difference between the two branches of the family—the children of Edwin and Carlos Atherdale. One difference was that Carlos's children were fair, and Edwin's dark. A

second difference was the national stamp of the fair-haired American-born Atherdales; their accent savoured of the Transatlantic; and besides this, even when they were silent, an indescribable something in their manner and appearance distinguished them from their London cousins, and marked that they were not, or at least were only partly, English, to all observant eyes. The English Atherdales were bright-eyed, fresh-complexioned, and rosy-cheeked, all but Alfred, the eldest son. He was tall, pale, and of a delicate and somewhat classic style of face; wonderfully handsome his mother thought, and certainly admitted as good-looking by people in general. Dark-eyed Dora was prettier than her blue-eyed cousin Christine; but the latter's face was very sweet and attractive, and her smile singularly gentle and winning. These two elder girls were nearly of the same height and age; Dora's two little sisters were curly-haired bonnie little lassies, who would probably grow up not quite so pretty as Dora was.

"We gave such lots of buns to the bears," announced little Lizzie, as she sat down to her tea; "Carlos bought us eight penn'orth, and some three-corner tarts besides."

"Altogether you gave away a meal of which many a starving man would have been glad," observed Alfred; one of whose habits was never to lose the opportunity of inculcating a moral lesson. "Now did any of you think how many poor families would have

been grateful for those buns you gave the fat, over-fed bears?"

"We did not think of that," said Christine, looking suddenly conscience-stricken.

"Well now, Christine, you needn't look doleful about it," exclaimed Carlos. "You gave away the tarts you'd bought for yourself. A ragged boy came along begging," he explained to the table in general, "and Christine handed her whole bag of cakes over to him right away."

"Jam tarts!—a very solid meal for a hungry boy. He asked for bread, and you gave him a tart," observed Alfred, smiling.

"Why then, Alfred, if he only wanted *bread*, what good would our plum buns have done him?" asked Dora, eagerly, seeing a weak point to attack.

"Bravo, Dora!" said Carlos, laughing and patting her shoulder.

"I think Alfred is quite right; I'm very sorry for the poor people who are always hungry," said Christine.

"But I thought you objected, Alfred, my dear, to the monkey-man, and to my poor organ-grinder?" said Mrs. Atherdale.

"I do," replied Arthur promptly. The monkey-man's a lazy do-nothing beggar; the sweeper, I'm sorry to say, mother, I regard as a drunken vagabond. On principle, I disapprove of indiscriminate charity. This single city is a swamp of imposture and humbug. There's a most innocent-looking, artful little beggar

girl I've met three times in this very neighbourhood, who's always crying, and has always dropped her only sixpence down a grating."

Alfred continued to give details of the man who falls in a fit daily, in some conveniently crowded thoroughfare; and the poor widow who had been seen for the last ten years in rusty mourning, with a small baby that never grew any older, trying to make up one-and-ninepence to complete her rent, and generally obtaining the entire sum from some charitable passer-by.

"I'd rather not be up to all these tricks," said Carlos. "By all you say, you can't tell a poor fellow really hungry from a humbugging impostor."

"The remedy is simply this," rejoined Alfred, "to avoid indiscriminate charity. It is a wrong to the deserving poor."

Mrs. Atherdale nodded approvingly; Christine was listening attentively and admiringly, yet looking a little out of her depth.

"It is the curse of all great cities to engender sin and misery," continued Alfred. "We are surrounded by shams and swindles, in helping which we only pander to fraud and imposture. It is the contemplation of these things that destroys the youth and faith of those who think. Faith is youth. What faith in human nature can be left when these things are known?"

"Then why tell about them?" put in Carlos.

"I admit I have never quite seen," said Mrs. Cleve, "the good of encouraging impulsive young natures to that indiscriminate charity which, as Alfred says, does so much harm."

Mrs. Cleve had recollected, what Alfred himself had forgotten, that he had begun the conversation by reproaching the children for the very lack of that charity which he afterwards condemned. Neither was she ignorant that Alfred as a rule was the least liberal of the party, though he would do a very good-natured thing now and then. Whatever covert satire was in her remark, however, passed unnoticed: she spoke mildly and deferentially as usual; and Alfred was gratified by her apparent agreement with his doctrines.

Christine and Dora each adopted and carried out a separate portion of Alfred's views. Dora the next day frowned and shook her little head at beggars, and remarked, "Now I dare say he never was a soldier at all, and hasn't really lost his arm. Alfred says they can double their arms up, to sham a stump." Christine, laying to heart his reproach concerning the bears and the buns, was so charitable with her pocket-money that her landlady remonstrated—

"Them hurdy-gurdy fellows 'll always be a comin', Miss, and a ringin' of the bell, drat 'em! if you gives 'em so much."

The landlady was a worthy old soul, and dealt with reasonable fairness and honesty by her two young

to make the heat of the  
it's too hot for a fire  
in the kitchen to make  
body ever makes it for him  
they make it once, and she

growled?" said Dora.  
Carlos growl, just come and let  
Christine.

chocolate to-day; do let me  
; and of course had her way.

making resulted in its boiling over,  
of it being lost; and Carlos came  
up could be made. He however  
by drinking and praising the quarter  
ained; while Christine, leaving them  
ons, quietly knelt by the fire and made

u't make it nicer than I do though, does  
Dora, coquettishly.

nothing can be better than the best, you  
plied Carlos.

ould soon learn to do everything as well as  
I'm sure," remarked Dora hopefully,  
they say at home she manages so wonder-  
and they think it's so astonishing, your inde-  
nce and self-reliance."

lodgers, Carlos and his sister. They paid regularly, spoke pleasantly, and both treated their landlady with a sort of frank trusting friendliness which won her best words for them ; and inspired her, as she frequently declared, with the feelings of a mother towards Miss Atherdale.

Carlos and Christine were as happy as the birds. They knew that two extra beds would slightly tax the accommodation of Inkermann Villa ; and besides, although they would be thoroughly welcome guests, and even if there had been a palatial suite of apartments there at their disposal, they loved the liberty of their present life. They were every day with their cousins, or their cousins with them, and yet they felt free. And however sweetly Christine's gentle, affectionate nature would have accepted any authority, restraint of any sort was the one thing Carlos hated and defied.

Dora was very fond of going to drink tea with her cousins. She, a girl still in the school-room, watched over by mother and governess, who set her her tasks and pointed her out her path, a girl who had never taken a step unadvised and undirected, enjoyed the self help of the little establishment of three rooms, over which Christine, two months younger than herself, presided. They toasted their own muffins and made their own tea ; Carlos cut plates full of thin bread and butter, and Christine often concocted a sweet omelet or cake of some sort ; the summer was

not yet advanced enough to make the heat of the little fire oppressive.

"What will you do when it's too hot for a fire here?" asked Dora.

"Why, then I'll go down in the kitchen to make Carlos his chocolate. Nobody ever makes it for him but me. I let Mrs. Smedley make it once, and she spoilt it."

"And I suppose he growled?" said Dora.

"The day you hear Carlos growl, just come and let me know!" replied Christine.

"Let *me* make his chocolate to-day; do let me try!" entreated Dora; and of course had her way.

Dora's chocolate-making resulted in its boiling over, and three-quarters of it being lost; and Carlos came in before a fresh cup could be made. He however delighted Dora by drinking and praising the quarter of a cup that remained; while Christine, leaving them to their muffins, quietly knelt by the fire and made another cup.

"She doesn't make it nicer than I do though, does she?" said Dora, coquettishly.

"Why, nothing can be better than the best, you know," replied Carlos.

"I should soon learn to do everything as well as Christine, I'm sure," remarked Dora hopefully, "though they say at home she manages so wonderfully; and they think it's so astonishing, your independence and self-reliance."

"Our independence! Why, I should think we ought to be self-reliant and independent at our age!" said Carlos, with an air of having lived a lifetime. "Why, when I was fifteen I crossed the Plains by myself, from Louisiana right to Utah city, when I went to join Uncle Geoff, the year father died. And I reckon Chris and I have had travelling enough coming from right away West to New York, and from New York over here, to be pretty self-reliant by this time!"

"I dare say you are a couple of most remarkable young people, and I should like to go and travel about with you two very much," said Dora; "but with all the wonderful things you've done, Carlos, you know there's something I can do that you can't!"

"I dare say there are plenty of things your nimble little fingers can do that my clumsy ones can't."

"I can play chess!" announced Dora, "and I'm going to teach you. There's a board and men on the sideboard; and you are going to play with me."

"Of course I am, if you tell me so," agreed Carlos; and the pair sat down to play chess accordingly, while Christine occupied herself with a piece of needlework. It was a conversational and desultory game; for Dora interspersed her instructions to Carlos with casual remarks and questions on other subjects, which certainly made the evening livelier for Christine; as lookers-on at a game of two have not as a rule an interesting part to play.

"Mrs. Cleve's sister is coming on Tuesday to

spend two or three days with us," said Dora. "Now, Carlos, you ought to have moved your queen there. I shan't let you have the move again. She's so nice, and she sings duets with me."

"Is she old?" inquired Carlos.

"Older than I am, but not old. Eighteen, I think."

"I thought Mrs. Cleve was the youngest sister of that lady Uncle Geoffrey was in love with, who died," said Christine.

"Now, Chris, what a little gossip you are!" said Carlos, rather disapprovingly.

"And why on earth shouldn't she gossip?" asked Dora, opening her eyes. "Mrs. Cleve was a younger sister, but not the youngest. The youngest ones are only half-sisters, you know."

"Half-sisters. Oh, I see—half-sisters of the eldest, of the one that died," said Christine, who had not at the first moment found Dora's explanation lucid. The door opened, and a slipshod little servant girl appeared, saying, "Letters, Miss."

Christine took the letters, looked at the superscriptions, and instantly put one behind her back, saying delightedly—

"Now, Carlos! what will you give me for this?"

- "What it's worth," replied her brother, stretching out his hand for it.

"Perhaps that's more than you'd like to pay," said Christine gaily.

"Six cents! I bid six cents," exclaimed Carlos. "If it's a six cent letter, hand it over. If it's a penny letter, you can keep it."

"Well, there it is," said his sister, giving up the yellow envelope with the double green stamps.

"Uncle Geoff," said Carlos, looking pleased as he opened it. "Come now, girls, sit down, and let's have the latest news from over the water."

Uncle Geoffrey's letter did not, however, deal much in news. He informed his young relatives that he was in New Orleans, but where he was going he could not tell. He filled up a page or two with the secession of Virginia from the Union, and the conquest of Fort Sumpter by the Confederates under General Beauregard—facts of which the newspapers had already made them well aware, and given them fuller details than did Uncle Geoffrey. He inquired how they liked "the mother country," and whether they were ever coming back; and he informed them of the welfare or ill-fare of two or three mutual friends, whose names—unknown, of course, to Dora—roused quite an enthusiasm of memories in Carlos and Christine. They bent their two heads together over the letter, and nearly pulled it out of each other's hands; they simultaneously read scraps aloud; their voices caught delightedly at well-known names, and their faces beamed with eager interest. Dora watched their pleasure with a shade of objection.

"You don't want to go back there, do you?" she

inquired. She looked at Carlos, but it was Christine who answered, putting her hand in her cousin's :—

“No, Dora dear, indeed we don't. We are real happy here ; and we shall write and tell Uncle Geoffrey how much we love the old country.”

“But *when* we go back !” exclaimed Carlos—  
“never mind, Dora, we're not going yet—but when we do go back to Uncle Geoff, what glorious times we'll have !”

For Uncle Geoffrey was framed and glazed in Carlos's gallery of heroes, and to Christine he was a real living cherished hero-friend ; while to his English nephew and nieces he was only a name. And while Christine had really “settled down” into English home-life, and learned to love her father's country and her English relatives with all her heart, Carlos still looked back across the wide Atlantic to the land he had not ceased to call “home ;” and felt as yet that the ways and customs of civilised “society-London”—of which, however, he knew but very little—fitted him no better than fetters on free limbs.





## CHAPTER III.

### THE YOUNGEST SISTER.

She was the rosy morning of a woman !  
Beauty was rising ; but the starry grace  
Of a calm childhood might be seen in her.

—*Biddoes.*



RS. ATHERDALE happened to receive a box at the opera for the evening on which Mrs. Cleve's sister was to arrive on her visit. She therefore arranged to take Dora, Christine, and the young visitor.

"And three charming young girls I shall have to take care of," she observed to Mrs. Cleve. "I wish my dear Alfred could go with us and do escort."

Alfred, however, was dining out that evening. If he had been at home, a place in the box would no doubt have been made for him somehow ; but, as it was, the four ladies might fill the four places with easy consciences.

Carlos was invited to spend the evening with the Atherdales with Mrs. Cleve and the children, who were promised as a treat to sit up that evening with

Cousin Carlos, and have supper when the quartette returned from the opera. Alfred also promised to be home to share in the sociable meal.

Accordingly, at the appointed hour, Carlos and Christine made their appearance at Inkermann Villa, the latter in evening toilette and opera-cloak.

"I'll just wait and see you people off; but I don't think I'll stay, you know. I'll be in somebody's way, or maybe putting them out somehow," observed Carlos, as he took off his cap and pitched it from one end of the hall to the topmost peg of the hat-stand at the other end with unerring aim—his ordinary mode of hanging up his head-gear.

The servant half-way up the stairs was heard announcing to an unseen somebody, "Mr. Carlos and Miss Christine." A voice was heard to reply, "Ask Miss Christine to come upstairs." Christine ran up accordingly, and the servant descended to show Carlos into the drawing-room, whither however he had already shown himself, *sans cérémonie*.

He would scarcely have flung open the door and sauntered in so cavalierly had he known that Miss Elma Dalziel, already dressed and ready for the opera, was there too.

She was sitting with a book in her hand—a bright-haired girl dressed all in white, with an exquisitely fair complexion and large dark eyes, who, as Carlos came in, looked at him inquiringly, rose up leisurely, and waited for him to speak. Carlos at the first

moment felt awkward and embarrassed : he was not yet quite sure of the ways and customs of English etiquette ; and while she waited for him and he waited for her to speak, they looked at each other.

Her eyes and expression were womanly ; her curling hair, rounded cheek, and innocently-parted lips were child-like. Her face was an almost perfectly lovely one : it was calm and bright in repose, and a dawning smile lit it up with a very radiance of fresh beauty.

"Mrs. Atherdale will not be long," she observed demurely.

"Thanks ; I don't want her," responded Carlos, in his abrupt boyish way, staring with rather open admiration, and amending his speech—"I mean I don't want to hurry her. I've only brought my sister ; she's gone upstairs."

"Yes, I know, she is going to the opera with us. And you are going to spend the evening here, are you not?"

"No, I don't think so," began Carlos, irresolutely.

"And have supper with us when we come back," continued Miss Dalziel.

"Well, I don't see how Christine is to get home if I don't stop, certainly," he replied, perceiving the necessity of his remaining.

When Mrs. Atherdale and Mrs. Cleve entered, they found the two young people conversing in a very friendly way : Carlos lounging in one easy-chair, and

Elma Dalziel gracefully erect in another, a discreet distance off.

"Well, you two seem comfortable enough," remarked Mrs. Atherdale, good-naturedly; "I suppose you have performed the ceremony of mutual introduction for yourselves."

"No, we didn't," said Carlos, pulling himself up to his full five feet eleven, like a big dog waking and shaking himself. "I for one didn't know whether it was the thing to do," he added, with as broad and bright a smile as if somebody had made the best joke of the day.

"And I thought the ceremony might be deferred until Mrs. Atherdale came down," observed the young lady.

"And now it doesn't seem very necessary," said Mrs. Atherdale. The door opened again, and the two cousins, Christine and Dora, entered.

"I shall be quite proud of my party," continued Mrs. Atherdale, glancing at the three young girls. "Carlos, don't you wish you were to be their escort instead of me?"

"Yes," he admitted frankly, looking at Elma Dalziel and Dora Atherdale as they stood together, the former arranging the latter's scarf for her. Elma did not look up, but Dora accepted and returned Carlos's look, and smiled.

They were a pretty trio of girlhood. Christine fair and tall and mild-eyed; Dora a bonnie brunette,

with roses and cherries on cheek and lips; Elma combining hair brighter than Christine's, with eyes deeper than Dora's, and features more perfect than either. But the dark-eyed pale governess who was to remain at home, was in her own style as beautiful as any of the younger group; only that idea did not occur to any one present.

"You'll stay till we come home to supper, of course, and take Christine back," said Mrs. Atherdale to her nephew. "Letty and Lizzie will be so glad to have you all to themselves, they say."

So Carlos stayed, and little Lizzie and Letty enjoyed a delightful evening. "Cousin Carlos" taught them new games, and showed them sleight-of-hand tricks, and told them wonderful stories of adventure; and then Mrs. Cleve sang to them, and played them lively airs, to which Carlos whistled accompaniment. The children were radiantly happy, and showed that they were so.

The great blessing of childhood is not so much that it takes so little to be happy, for it takes as little also to make it sad. Childhood's best blessing lies in the fact that its griefs and joys are equally evanescent and leave no trace. In after years a grief may pass, but never fails to cast its shadow behind it, whilst a joy passes, and leaves no trail of light.

Ina Cleve had naturally lived through joys and sorrows in the course of her seven and twenty years; but she had never known the joy that is Heaven, nor the

grief that is despair. She had not fallen into the great black pit that is cut across the path of many a life—the black and bitter waters from which a human soul may chance to struggle out and go on its way again, but from whose chill and bitterness no soul once immersed therein can ever be wholly free again. Not across all life-paths does this dark gulf run. Ina Cleve had never felt herself sinking in the dawnless midnight of its depths. Neither, on the other hand, had she ever stood on the summit of the Mountains of Delight, feeling lifted far above the earth, and level with the stars. This is not for all lives either! Moderately dark shadows had cast a twilight across her way; moderately bright sunbeams had broken through the branches and lit up the gloom. So, serenely, she had lived through childhood, girlhood, wifhood, and widowhood, grieving and rejoicing, and not knowing that the power was in her to grieve and rejoice more—with capacities for feeling which had never yet been proved—and without the knowledge that there were bitterer tears than she had ever shed, and deeper raptures than she had ever felt.

She was happy with the Atherdales, and very fond of the younger children; so that evening she sang and played for them right merrily, and felt young and happy herself as she joined in their laughter. As for Carlos he was generally high-spirited and light-hearted, and rather more so than usual that night. He had

been delighted and dazzled by Elma Dalziel's beauty, and anticipated with pleasure seeing her again. Alfred Atherdale came home from his dinner before the opera party returned, but not long before, slightly to his cousin Carlos's relief. Carlos admired Alfred's talents honestly, and had a dutiful regard for him as one of the family; but they generally held opposite opinions on every subject, and Alfred never forgot his two or three years' seniority; although it must be said in his behalf that he did not assert it arrogantly, and even "bore his honours meekly."

Mrs. Atherdale and "the three graces"—as Alfred of course called them in his greeting, in compliment to Miss Dalziel—returned smiling and satisfied with their evening. Elma Dalziel in her manner of meeting Alfred Atherdale was a young lady addressing a gentleman with whom she had only a slight acquaintance; but to Carlos, whom she had only seen for ten minutes, her manner was frank and free as though they had been boy and girl playmates or schoolfellows. The young men were both aware of this distinction, and were both gratified by it: Alfred seeing that the girl looked upon Carlos as a boy; Carlos seeing that, in whatever light she regarded him, it was a favourable and friendly one.

"The opera, when you come to think of it, is really a most ridiculous exhibition," observed Alfred. "A lover sings his proposal; the lady's answer is a shake on B flat. A prisoner pleads in a crescendo bass; and

the judge pronounces sentence in recitative. Can anything be more absurd?"

"Still we all enjoyed it; did we not, girls?" asked Mrs. Atherdale.

"Didn't we! Oh, it was so beautiful!" exclaimed Christine, drawing a long breath of remembered delight.

"And wasn't Tietjens splendid! I liked it, Alfred, absurd or not," added Dora.

"And, Miss Dalziel, do you like that most inconsistent of modern entertainments?"

"Meaning the opera? Certainly I do," replied that young lady. "If I shut my eyes, I should be content to hear the music. If I stopped my ears, I should be content to watch the play upon the stage. And if I were forbidden to notice the stage at all, I should find plenty of amusement in inspecting the audience, from the stalls to the gallery."

"So that, notwithstanding its inconsistency, it seems to afford you a variety of enjoyments," remarked her sister, Mrs. Cleve.

"Nevertheless, Miss Dalziel might derive quite as much pleasure, I imagine, from an entertainment more compliant with the unities of true Art," said Alfred, looking appealingly and rather admiringly at Elma.

"Oh, of course I should," she replied sweetly, with an answering look of deferential trust in his superior wisdom. Alfred smiled, well pleased; and Christine,

possibly afraid she had enjoyed herself too much, explained self-exculpatorily—

“It was the first time I had ever seen such a thing, and it was all so new and beautiful to me.”

“Very glad you enjoyed yourself, Christine,” said Alfred kindly. He was rather fond of his fair-haired, sweet-tempered Transatlantic cousin, who always treated him with naïve and simple admiration and faith.

She never contradicted him, never dissented from his doctrines, nor argued against his word, which she always accepted as conclusive. Elma Dalziel, during her three days' visit, opposed and argued against him more than Christine had ever done or ever would do; and yet flattered his vanity more subtly, by ultimate submission and feints of deference, than it was possible for Christine's simpler, softer nature to do. And he thought Elma Dalziel a charming girl, who would make a brilliant woman.

Carlos thought her a charming girl too; but it never entered his mind to think of what manner of a woman she would be. Whether her beauty was of a kind to fade or to endure, never occurred to him. He only knew she was the most attractive girl he had ever met.

“You'll be coming to London again soon, won't you, Miss Dalziel?” he asked her on the third and last evening of her visit.

“Not very soon I am afraid. I live with my aunt,

and she does not care for me to be much away from her."

"Well, I can't wonder at that. I guess I shouldn't give you very long leave of absence if I were your aunt."

"How fortunate then, for my enjoyment of society, that you are not my aunt! It wouldn't matter so much if you were my uncle."

"Why not? What's the difference?"

"Don't you know that men are always more lenient guardians of women than other women. And I could tease a man, and *make* him let me do as I liked," she said, with a mischievous sparkle in her bright eyes; then added, "Not that I ever need to tease my aunt; she is good and kind."

"I'd like to see the fellow who wouldn't be good to you," observed Carlos.

"Well, I own I have never met him yet," she admitted demurely.

"Somebody you have never met, Miss Dalziel?" struck in Alfred. "Anybody to whom we could have the pleasure of introducing you?"

"No, I think not; thanks," she replied, adding aside to Carlos, "I *hope* not; for I am in no hurry for the introduction."

"I wish you could have stayed another week, Elma, my dear," said Mrs. Atherdale. "There is a new play coming out on Saturday; we are all going; and I remember that you like to go on first nights and hear 'God save the Queen.'"

Elma assented warmly, and deeply regretted her inability to stay and hear the national anthem.

"You would not hear it anyhow; they only play it at the beginning of the season," said Alfred. "You like to hear it? you are patriotic, of course. All young ladies are."

"Not only *young* ladies—not only *ladies* even, I hope," remarked Elma.

"You admire the virtue of patriotism intensely, I perceive; yet it is one which may easily be pushed to a faulty excess."

"They say that *every* virtue may be pushed to a faulty excess," remarked Elma.

"And they say it truly. It tells sadly against human nature, I often think, to reflect that while the extreme of any virtue may become a defect, the extreme of no fault ever becomes a virtue."

A feminine chorus of assent showed the general approval of this sentiment. Mrs. Atherdale's and Christine's appreciation was almost a matter of course; but Mrs. Cleve's and Miss Dalziel's, because less certain, were more flattering: Elma's especially, as Alfred thought he read a sort of confiding admiration in the glance of her soft black eyes. A little argument goes a long way in a feminine circle like the Atherdale's: a little talent counts for a great deal with a fond mother; so Master Alfred was in a fair way to be spoilt by his appreciative family.

"Yes," he continued; "generosity becomes extra-

vagance ; courage becomes rashness ; prudence becomes meanness. Love of all sorts in excess becomes selfishness. Extreme patriotism leads to many evils. It narrows the mind ; it blinds the eyes to the good existing in other nations ; it fosters prejudice and the national pride, which is only one degree less offensive than personal pride. Besides, an excess of patriotism in a country like ours would have the injurious effect of acting as a check on emigration. We are overpopulated ; there are vast lands under-populated. We have not work enough to supply our working hands ; there are fertile lands where work is waiting for hands to do it."

"That is true," said Elma thoughtfully ; forgetting her little coquetries as she listened. Mrs. Cleve's quiet eyes were more attentive and interested than usual now, for it was one of her own "theories" that Alfred was broaching.

"So when Patriotism reigns in the mind of one of the great surplus working-class here, it reigns to stand between him and the chances of a busier, better life," continued Alfred. "It chains him to a miserable poverty-stricken city home, when there are broad lands of which he might take possession, and where he might live free, useful, and prosperous. So the virtue does the work of a vice ; the weaknesses of what are called one's "better feelings" block the way of progress. The world has no one virtue that is not impaired by excess ; and unhappily for us, no

one fault whose extreme can by any possibility become virtue."

"For all that," said Carlos stoutly, "I don't think so badly of the world. And the fellows who emigrate are a noble set," he added,—as his best friends must have admitted, quite irrelevantly.

"A fact which I certainly never denied," said Alfred truly.

"They never forget the old country," went on Carlos, espousing their cause illogically, when nobody had attacked them. "Didn't you ever hear the story of the skylark that sang outside the store, and how the men came in crowds and bid heaps and heaps of gold-dust for it, for the sake of their English homes?"

"I have read the anecdote in some story-book," replied Alfred.

"Well, it's true then," rejoined Carlos, "for I know a fellow that was there and heard the lark sing!"

"Well, Carlos, that's conclusive! We all concede the authenticity of the anecdote, I am sure," said Alfred, good-humouredly; quite satisfied with his own enormous superiority, and smiling with a pleasant self-gratulation.

A few minutes afterwards Carlos and Christine rose up to go.

"I haven't been talking too deep for you to-night, Christine, have I?" asked Alfred, as he pressed her hand.

"Oh no, Alfred, I like to hear you talk, it is real nice," she answered, with the frank and candid manner and confiding gentleness that characterised her.

Elma Dalziel glanced at the two before she turned to Carlos; who, obeying his impulses as usual, had held out both hands to her for good-night. As frankly Elma gave him both hers, with a smile of open friendliness that sent through his heart a thrill of pleasure, and then a sudden regret, as he remembered it was a farewell smile—a parting good-night. She was to leave the Atherdales the next morning.

"Dear children!" observed Mrs. Atherdale, as the door closed upon Carlos and Christine, "they are quite a part of our own home, as you see, my dear Elma; and I am sure you don't wonder at our all being very fond of them. Christine is such a dear amiable girl."

"Very amiable," said Elma sincerely; "very yielding and easily managed I should think," she added with an imperceptible glance at Alfred.

"Carlos is not very yielding though," interposed Dora; "but he is nice, isn't he? *You* seemed to like him."

"I do," responded Elma warmly and readily. "There isn't a bit of deceit or doubleness about him. He is a much stronger nature than his sister, and just as good and true as she is I am sure."

"Carlos is happy in finding such a friend," observed

Alfred ; wondering what a lovely intelligent girl like Elma Dalziel could possibly find to be enthusiastic about in the cousin who was, in *his* eyes, an awkward long-legged hobble-de-hoy, with an objectionable American accent, and an unruly disposition.





## CHAPTER IV.

### WELCOME HOME !

Seas between us braid hae roared,  
Sin' auld langsyne !



JUNE evening. The Atherdales were at tea, Carlos and Christine, as happened five days a week, partaking of that light meal.

The day had been fine ; the early evening was tranquil and sweet, and

“ Warm with sunshine gone away.”

A last lingering breeze played through the tops of the tall laurel bushes, and fluttered the light curtains round the open window ; the western sunbeams slanted in and lit up the room with a mellow golden light. The borders of the little garden and the flower stands in the window were bright and fragrant with summer blossoms.

“ It was the time of roses.” There were great bunches of roses in vases on the mantel-piece ; there were roses in the girls' hair, and roses starring their

dresses. Red roses in Dora's dark curls ; a white rose in Christine's blonde locks ; a pink rosebud nestling amongst Ina Cleve's glossy braids, which the girls had insisted on arranging there, and which looked well and in its fitting place in the rich coronet of her dark hair. What with the fair faces round the table, the blooming flowers, the youth and beauty blooming too, and the mellow sunshine brightening all, it was a pretty home-scene, though common and commonplace enough.

Mrs. Atherdale, at the head of the table facing the window, presided over the coffee ; Mrs. Cleve, at the opposite end, superintended the tea. Carlos and Christine sat at either side of their aunt ; the children by Mrs. Cleve. According to the natural order of things, Dora's place was next to Carlos, and Alfred's next to Christine.

"This warm weather makes one long for the sea," observed Mrs. Atherdale.

"Doesn't it !" assented Carlos. "Don't I wish I was way out on the Atlantic ! Wouldn't it be fine if we were all crossing over together now !"

"My dear Carlos, Heaven forbid !" said Mrs. Atherdale. "I for one should be exceedingly ill in the cabin."

"I am afraid I should be in no state to enjoy the beauty of the weather," observed Mrs. Cleve.

"And I think, if it's all the same to you, Carlos, I'd rather be where I am," laughed Dora.

"Carlos's idea of happiness does not seem to meet with general approval," observed Alfred.

"Say, did any of you ever go a long voyage?" demanded Carlos. "No? Then you don't know the delights of it. Christine does."

"Yes, but even *I* didn't appreciate them for the first few days."

"Mamma," said little Lizzie interrupting, "there's a man in the garden!"

Several glances were directed towards the front garden accordingly. There was a man, but dimly seen through the fringe of laurel bushes, standing on the gravel path, apparently looking at the window.

"Sarah must have left the gate open," observed Mrs. Atherdale. "Careless of her. Who is it?"

"Somebody come begging," suggested Dora.

"Perhaps an organ man," said Lizzie.

"He's a very odd looking man, and he's got a bag in his hand," said Letty, who had a good view.

These various speculative remarks were suddenly cut short by an exclamation from Carlos, who started up from the table, fixed one more eager look on the man in the garden, and then, with a shout of "Hurrah!" dashed out of the room, knocking over a couple of light chairs in his hasty exit.

While yet Mrs. Atherdale was calling out, "Carlos, are you mad?" while Dora uttered a little scream, and the rest of the party stared and sat dumb with surprise, Carlos's shout was answered by a sort of wild Indian

war whoop—uttering which the man in the garden flung up his hat in the air, and disappeared towards the hall-door, out of sight of the window.

In a moment the whole party—except Mrs. Cleve and Alfred, who took things more leisurely—were on their feet and hurrying to the hall-door. Before they reached it, they heard Carlos eagerly hail, “Uncle Geoff!” they heard an answering voice exclaim, almost as gladly, “Carlos!”

Mrs. Atherdale uttered an interjection of delighted amazement.

“What, Geoffrey! Geoffrey?” she cried out breathlessly, rushing forward.

The stranger stood outside the threshold, shaking Carlos by both hands enthusiastically. He was tall and fair, and “bearded like the pard;” he had a picturesque broad-brimmed hat pulled over his brows, wore a fur-trimmed coat, and had thrown his valise down on the gravel path that he might grasp both Carlos’s eager hands.

It was full three and twenty years since Mrs. Atherdale had seen her cousin and brother-in-law Geoffrey. She would not have identified him with this bearded stranger, if it had not been for Carlos’s recognition. Stunned and startled, she stood for a moment looking on, and in that moment Christine had flown after Carlos down the hall-door steps and had flung her arms round her uncle’s neck delightedly.

Then Mrs. Atherdale woke up to the reality of the

wanderer's return. It was a truth, and not a dream or a delusion.

"Geoffrey," she said warmly, her eyes filling with tears of memory and old association, "Welcome—welcome home!"

Amidst a Babel of welcomes and wonders, greetings, questions, and congratulations, Geoffrey Atherdale entered Inkermann Villa, and was pulled into the parlour by two or three pairs of eager hands.

Mrs. Cleve and Alfred Atherdale were of course by this time amongst the animated group, looking with curiosity and interest—the woman naturally more curious than the man—on the absentee of whom they had heard so much, but whom till this hour they had never seen. Geoffrey Atherdale stood still and surveyed the room and its inmates, with a cool and rapid survey that took in the walls, furniture, pictures, tea-table, and each and every face in the family group of which he stood the central figure.

"Your son, Maria?" he said, indicating Alfred. "And these little maids—one, two, three," counting Dora, Letty, and Lizzie—"all yours? No more I suppose?" Being assured that there were no other young branches of the Atherdale tree, he looked next at Ina Cleve. "This lady?"

"Mrs. Cleve," said Mrs. Atherdale, remembering, but not alluding to the fact, that Ina Cleve was the half sister of Viola Dalziel, for whose sake Geoffrey was supposed to have led his lonely single life.

Geoffrey looked at his first love's sister, and seemed in no hurry to look away from her ; but there was no recollection nor glimpse of recognition in his eye, only the approval and attention of a man scanning a face that pleases him. Ina Cleve looked beautiful enough that evening to please even those who said she was "not their style." Her face—pure in outline, purer in complexion, purest in expression—was lit up from within by the interest that filled her eyes as they met Geoffrey's ; lit from without too by the mellow setting sunshine that warmed her dark hair and glistened bright on the pink rose amongst the coiled plaits. She was fond of wearing soft flowing black silk dresses, summer and winter ; and they set off her tall, slender, but not fragile, figure, and suited her classic beauty well.

Having mentally "made a note of" her attractions, Geoffrey Atherdale turned and laid his hand on Carlos's shoulder.

"So, Carlos boy ! you knew me first, eh ?"

"Letty thought you were an organ man," said his nephew laughing, "but *I* knew you in a minute of course. You did just take us all by surprise."

"By surprise indeed," repeated Mrs. Atherdale, "I can scarcely yet believe it is really you !"

"Pinch me, Maria, and make sure I'm not a ghost."

"When did you land ? when did you sail ? where

have you come from? why didn't you write and tell us?"

"Landed at midnight; came from Liverpool to-day; left my luggage at the station; brought a bag with me. Made myself quite at home, you see."

"Where else should your home be but here? Sit down; you must be tired. Dora, tell Sarah to get the spare room ready directly. Now, Geoffrey, I don't say, 'make yourself at home'—you *are* at home."

"Home!—I never had a home—never shall have," he said, more brusquely than sadly, yet sadly withal.

When the stir and surprise of the meeting had worn off, and the traveller had partaken of a light impromptu meal, the question was raised: Why, when, and how, had he made up his mind to return to England.

"Well, I got dreaming of the little island over the water. Not figuratively, literally dreaming. Used to dream of England every night and all night long. I thought maybe the dreams might be sent for something—besides, I had long been thinking of a run across the Atlantic. I wouldn't write to any one, because I always make up my mind suddenly; but it was in my mind that some day I'd come back and pay you all a visit. So—there was a vessel sailing from New Orleans, and I just took my ticket and came."

"And heartily glad we all are you have come.

Now, if you are ready, Geoffrey, we'll go into the drawing-room."

To the drawing-room accordingly they resorted. Mrs. Atherdale had noticed how quick and observant were Geoffrey's eyes; and as she passed the little side-table where Viola Dalziel's portrait stood in its oval morocco case, she cast a rather anxious glance at it. Geoffrey was looking in another direction, but there was no knowing how soon those keen eyes of his would fix upon the table where the picture was; and she wished that this, his first evening with them, should not be damped, nor the pleasure of meeting marred, by any painful memory being touched upon. Ina Cleve noticed Mrs. Atherdale's look; the same thought was in her own mind.

On the impulse of the moment, with a quick silent turn of her hand as she passed, she laid the portrait face downwards behind some books.

Geoffrey Atherdale took stock of the drawing-room, as he had done of the dining-room.

"You are nicely fixed here," he remarked with an air of approbation. "Lived here long?"

"Ten years."

"Ten years! And in those ten years I've lived in as many States, from Massachusetts to New Mexico, and never stayed for six months together under any one roof. And you people have lived here on your cabbage-leaf for ten years."

"And have never felt a longing to leave it," re-

sponded his sister-in-law. "Perhaps, Geoffrey, you might have been a happier man—no one knows—if you had had your cabbage-leaf too."

"I didn't mean any disparagement of your home, Maria," said Geoffrey. "We all live on bigger or lesser cabbage-leaves. Mine has been a pretty big leaf—from the Pacific to the Atlantic shore—but it's only a cabbage-leaf in the great universe."

"I should be very glad to have crawled over such a one," observed Alfred. "The stores of adventure and experience you must have accumulated would be invaluable to me."

"I dare say I'll unpack a few of my stores for you during my stay here. Why would they be valuable to you? What's your line of life?"

"Well, I am practising for the bar, and I hope some day to carve myself a path in literature."

"Ah," said Geoffrey, nodding, and offering no other comment.

"He is not very strong," said Mrs. Atherdale, "and I do not wish him to work too hard. He is getting on very well, but I have had to be very careful about his health."

"My mother is too anxious about me," said Alfred, deprecatingly.

"Mothers always are. And you, Carlos, what are you doing in London?"

"Not half so much as Alfred is, just now; but I'm going to get to work. I am down for a place in Tre-

velyan's office, as soon as he's got room for me. I'll make a good thing of it I think. You know about Trevelyan—Joe Trevelyan's brother?"

"To be sure I do. Old Joe's married at last. I went to look him up in New Orleans the other day."

Geoffrey next fixed his attention on the piano.

"Who sings? Somebody sing something to me," he requested.

"Dora, dear, sing one of your new songs to your uncle. And then Mrs. Cleve will give us a song."

So Dora sang, in a pretty weak soprano; and Mrs. Cleve sang, in a sweet contralto voice; and Geoffrey Atherdale sat listening, with one elbow on a table, his fingers pushed into his hair, his eyes fixed on the ground, and his thoughts—Heaven only knew where!

Carlos and Christine went home as usual that night; but their uncle Geoffrey occupied the one spare room at Inkermann Villa. The family, however, sat up unusually late for an early household; long after the children were in bed and asleep the lamps were burning in the drawing-room; and Mrs. Atherdale, Alfred, Mrs. Cleve, and Geoffrey sat talking the hours away.

"Carlos and Christine hit it off well with your little folks, Maria, I'm glad to see."

"Yes, indeed, we all love them. Carlos is so like his poor father; only somehow he is not quite like an English boy. And he seems to have just grown wild without a bit of training."

"Not thoroughly tamed and broken in, eh? Well,

the boy lost his mother you see, and it was a wild part he was born in ; and as to 'bringing up,' as you'd call it, he brought himself up."

"I suppose the customs are very different over there," said Mrs. Atherdale, vaguely indicating the West.

"Well, rather. We have no manners, and not any customs to speak of. Our toilettes are scanty ; scalps are the prevalent ornaments of our drawing-rooms ; and broadcloth and beaver are unknown to us. It has been a great trial to me to force myself into a black coat ; and I still feel a spoon and fork a painful novelty, and hanker after my primitive meals of buffalo-steak, cut with a bowie-knife. I really should wonder how that boy Carlos has lived so long among you without scalping somebody, only I know he left his tomahawk behind."

"He has shown no such sanguinary disposition," said Mrs. Cleve laughing.

"Now, Christine seems much more cultivated and gentler and less wild than Carlos," observed Mrs. Atherdale.

"Christine had more schooling, for one thing," replied Geoffrey. "And then she takes after her mother in manner and nature. Her mother was of a good old Puritan family—a curious mixture of race-by-the-bye : a Southern branch grafted on a Puritan stock. They had called their three eldest girls Faith, Hope, and Charity ; the one my brother married ought

to have been called Charity, if there's anything in a name. She was the youngest and the sweetest ; she had all her family's goodness, and none of the narrowness and severity of the Puritan side ; she was a soft clinging creature—Southern softness and Northern constancy—with eyes like a deer's."

"Why, I wonder you didn't fall in love with her yourself, Geoffrey !" observed his sister-in-law thoughtlessly.

"There are fools enough in the world without my adding to the list, aren't there ?" he said.

And soon they parted for the night.

The next morning when they descended to breakfast, the guest was found in the garden, muffled in his fur-lined coat as though it were December instead of June, his soft slouched hat pulled over his eyes, and a cigar in his mouth. A close and calm morning inspection of Geoffrey Atherdale revealed likenesses and unlikenesses to the rest of the family which their first excited and confused evening view had failed to impress upon them. Mrs. Atherdale caught glimpses now in his face of his two brothers, both so many years dead ; there were reminiscences of this feature of "poor Carlos's," and that feature of "dear Edwin's." Of Geoffrey's nephews and nieces, Carlos resembled him the most, though in Alfred's pale, slightly hollowed cheeks, and thin finely cut features, a certain resemblance to his new-known uncle could be traced.

Geoffrey Atherdale's mass of thick fair hair was the very counterpart of his nephew Carlos's curly locks ; the general cast of feature, and something in the expression of the smile, also, were singularly alike in both man and boy. But on Geoffrey's face the smile came rarer and was more transient ; on Geoffrey's brow the lines of care had worn deeper than those of age ; Geoffrey's sunken cheeks had a pallor like that of some long ceaseless suffering ; and from Geoffrey's eyes not a trace of Carlos's bright sanguine spirit looked out. There was a curious furtive gleam—sometimes a wild suddenness of glance, like that of an only half-tamed panther startled from its sleep—and then, withal, a pain and a desolation sadder than tears—in Geoffrey Atherdale's deep-set grey eyes.

Whilst his relatives looked at him and found out likenesses, he for his part was looking most of the time at Mrs. Cleve, as she sat at the breakfast table, graceful and busy. She was not dressed that morning in her usual black silk, but in a simple summer cambric. In this light dress she looked younger and more girlish, and she struck Geoffrey with a vague sense of perplexed half-memory. A resemblance in her face to something he knew not what, was faintly dawning upon him. Was it a picture—a person ? He could not tell ; his memory seemed a blank concerning that face of hers ; and yet it suggested to him that he must somewhere, somehow, have seen something like it before.

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Some little time after breakfast he found himself alone in the drawing-room. He took up the books and pictures on the centre table, looked at the music on the piano, absently whistled a dismal minor tune, and then—as Satan finds mischief ever for idle hands, etc.—his idle hands resorted to the side-table, and turned over the books and pictures there one by one. Of course in this inspection he picked up the case containing Viola Dalziel's portrait.

Mrs. Cleve, entering the room in search of a work-basket of Mrs. Atherdale's, came suddenly upon Geoffrey Atherdale standing with Viola's portrait in his hand.

Ina Cleve, with her fine sympathies and sensitive nature, felt dismayed and embarrassed to think that she had intruded on him just at this inopportune moment. His face, set in the fixed and intent look it now wore, was not an easy one to read. It told no tales, even when he turned his eyes from the portrait to Ina Cleve.

"What's this? how comes it here?" he asked briefly, in a low voice, but with perfect composure.

"It is my sister's portrait," she said.

"*Your sister,*" he repeated with surprise, and looked from her to the picture. "Your sister!" and a light began to dawn upon him as he remembered the sense of vague half-recognition with which her face had that morning impressed him.

"My sister Viola. I was Ina Dalziel."

"Ina! I remember little Ina," he said. "And you are she? You were a little child." He seemed divided between an impulse to draw away from her and look coldly on her, and an inclination to greet her as a friend. "I thought there was something in your face that was familiar to me," he added. "It is Mrs. Dalziel, your mother, whom you are like."

Between Ina and her lost sister Viola there existed but little likeness. Still Geoffrey searched and scrutinised her face as if to find her sister there. Her own eyes drooped under his fixed gaze; she was not sorry to hear Dora call her, and to take the basket for which she had come, and leave the room.

But at the door she glanced back, and saw Geoffrey's eyes following her strangely—intently, earnestly, but not admiringly. She would have thought it the look rather of an enemy than of a friend.





## CHAPTER V.

“GOING TO LEAVE US?”

O there is no heart that loves on earth,  
But may live to be loved again !

—*Massey.*



GEOFFREY ATHERDALE was a welcome guest at Inkermann Villa. He possessed the quality, invaluable in a visitor, however near and dear a relative, of being “no trouble.” He liked to be let alone, he said ; he accommodated himself to everything, went his own way, and interfered with nobody else’s way.

He unpacked from his big American trunks numberless treasures for the children, ornaments for Mrs. Atherdale and Dora, curiosities for Alfred, and pictures and souvenirs of places they had mutually known, for Carlos and Christine. He went about to see all that was to be seen in London and its environs ; and never took a pleasure excursion without some or all of his young relatives. The children loved him, but that was not singular to the children. Every one loved Geoffrey Atherdale more or less : there was an

attraction about him that unfailingly won the affection of those amongst whom he lived ; and the mystery and romance attached to his changeful, adventurous, little-known, little-comprehended life, rendered him all the more attractive and interesting to feminine eyes.

Alfred really liked him well, and liked him none the less, that Geoffrey was owner of the estate of Saxby Towers, which was unentailed, and Alfred his eldest nephew.

To Mrs. Cleve Geoffrey never talked much, or paid much attention ; yet he often looked at her when her eyes were turned another way. Mrs. Atherdale thought that Ina Cleve's face and voice might naturally remind him painfully of her sister, and wondered, with a sentimental feminine interest, whether many men had suffered as long from an early loss as had "poor dear Geoffrey?"

One day Geoffrey and his two nephews were lounging in three garden chairs on the lawn ; Mrs Cleve was seated on a bench in a sort of ivy bower with little Lizzie, teaching her a new knitting-stitch ; Letty sat on a mat at Geoffrey's feet.

"I reckon these little maids will be grown up and married whenever I come back to Europe again," observed Geoffrey (who always spoke vaguely of "going back soon"), patting Letty's little curly head. "And you boys will be tied up first, I suppose? You're not going to be misanthropical, homeless wanderers like me?"

"I mean to get married some day," said Carlos, with an air of having fully made up his mind, weighed all the pros and cons, and decided against a bachelor life.

"I can't say that I have at present any idea of taking a plunge into matrimony," said Alfred. "But I dare say that I shall some day also act in accordance with the maxim, that it is not good for man to be alone."

"Ah, better alone though than with the wrong woman!" observed his uncle.

"It behoves a man to consider well before he takes his plunge," remarked Alfred.

"Yes, he can at least make his choice, though he can't unmake it," rejoined Geoffrey. "There's no law to prevent a rash young fellow from making a fool of himself, but all the laws of the land unite to tie him up in his folly when it's made."

"And a big shame it is," interposed Carlos. "A man and a woman may be wretched together, and they might both be happy with somebody else. So there they are, tied together like two dogs in a leash, growling, and each life spoilt. It seems to me that every mismatched pair spoils another pair, beside itself."

"I think I can follow your meaning, Carlos," said Alfred. "I suppose you would advocate the doctrine of the Elective Affinities, etc.; but I think you would find the sentimental theory of kindred souls a weak

weapon wherewith to attack the ancient and sacred institution of marriage."

"I'm willing to hold marriage just as sacred as ever you like, but not on account of its being ancient. I don't think a thing's sacred *only* because it's *old*; there are plenty of old laws and institutions that the New World and the Old World alike are very glad to have abolished. No one respects what I call real true marriage more than I do; but as for the couples who don't care a straw for each other, and spar and jar, and wish they'd never been such fools as to marry, I don't hold their marriage sacred."

"Marriage is a contract for life," replied Alfred; "and that knowledge should promote a mutual patience and leniency in each toward the other's failings. It is a poor manhood, Carlos, that deserts its post because there are hardships to undergo."

"The man who knocks down the barriers he doesn't hold lawful, and breaks the chains of a code he doesn't believe in, is not the man who 'deserts his post,' which is a thing only a coward would do," replied Carlos, resolutely.

"The tendency of this age is towards a breakage of chains and a throwing off of all superfluous authority," observed Geoffrey quietly. "You two boys stick each to your own colours, I'm glad to see. I don't think it matters much what standard you follow so long as you follow it faithfully. Well, I've known a good many men, married and single, in my life; and the

man who was most devoted to his wife ; the truest and most loyal husband for twenty years, and who lost his life in saving his wife at last ; was a man who held the marriage-bond as dissoluble by mutual desire of freedom, and advocated that opinion constantly and openly on all occasions."

"I should be inclined to think," rejoined Alfred, "that he was faithful merely because his faith was never tried ; loyal simply because he happened never to meet with any temptation to be disloyal."

"You go upon the ground that *he* would have yielded to a temptation which a man of more orthodox morals would have resisted, or that temptation would not assail a man defended by the triple shield of orthodoxy. My experience does not lead me to grant that it is impossible for a passion a man believes sinful to seize upon him. Just as a man without his own will may find himself a prey to bodily disease, so the mental disease of evil passions may assail him."

"May assail him only to be conquered," persisted Alfred.

"Even if after a hard fight, to *be* conquered," agreed Carlos ; now, on the question of conflicts of will and passion, marching under Alfred's banner.

"But such a conquest costs wounds that leave scars for all a life-time," said Geoffrey ; "and strength of Will is the weapon that conquers, more than the artificial strength of instilled doctrines."

Little Letty, long ago weary of even a semblance of

listening to the conversation, was stringing daisy chains on the lawn. The theories were also lost on Lizzie, dividing her attention between her knitting and the black puppy. But Ina Cleve, with her work in her lap, was listening, and looking at Geoffrey Atherdale, whether he was speaking or not.

"Shocked, Mrs. Cleve?" he asked briefly, catching her eyes.

"No," she replied quietly, offering no remark or question towards continuing the discussion, and bending quietly over her work again.

"Mental diseases, and evil passions, and battles with temptation, are lands unknown and unexplored by you, of course. They are to all good women."

"They're unknown to Mrs. Cleve. She's good," said Carlos.

"Neither Uncle Geoffrey nor I have any doubt of Mrs. Cleve's goodness. All who know her are well assured of that," said Alfred, offering his more graceful tribute to the lady's virtues.

Ina smiled courteously to Alfred, sweetly and warmly to Carlos. The latter, who generally spoke out whatever came uppermost in his mind, reminded by the smile of another subject, alluded to it straightway.

"Say, Mrs. Cleve, have you heard from your sister? Will she be able to come next week?"

"Yes, I hope so; her aunt is going away, and Elma can go about as she likes."

"A sister of yours?" asked Geoffrey.

"Yes, my youngest sister—my little Elma. She is much younger than I am—two years older than Dora."

"I guess that isn't so very many years difference," said Geoffrey.

"Nine years is a great many," observed Mrs. Cleve, and sank into a thoughtful silence.

"What are you thinking of?" demanded Geoffrey presently, coming close to her side, while the children were playing about, and Alfred and Carlos going towards the house to meet Dora and Christine on the steps.

"I am thinking that I ought to feel my age," replied Ina frankly. "I have had my girlhood and lived my life. I know that; and yet I can't feel it. Sometimes I feel an old woman—sometimes a girl—but scarcely ever my real age. I seem always too old or too young. That is what I was thinking just then."

"I know," he said, nodding as if he comprehended. "But you've no cause ever to feel old. You've led a good, quiet, peaceful life, have you not?"

The question was a comprehensive one.

Ina Cleve echoed the words pensively.

"A good, quiet, peaceful life? I suppose I have. Yet the description sounds so enviable—and I don't think my life has been a very enviable one."

"Has it not? You think not, having never experienced worse."

"I did not mean to complain. I have no cause to be discontented."

Christine and Dora came across the garden, with the two male cousins of course attendant.

"I have been trying to teach Christine some of my duets, but she says she can't manage them," said Dora. "I shall be glad when Elma comes again—Elma's voice suits mine so well. I like singing duets. I wish *you* would learn to sing with me, Carlos!" she added, turning to her cousin, and laying her hand on his sleeve with a pretty coquettish air that a harsh critic, severe on girlish vanities, might have called affected. But there were no harsh critics present. Geoffrey Atherdale might be bitter and gloomy sometimes, but never harsh on youth nor cynical to childhood; and Dora, with all her sixteen years, was a child to him. Besides, it was not Dora on whom his attention was fixed. Carlos patted the little fingers that rested on his sleeve with his broad sunburnt hand as he said:

"I'd rather hear you and Miss Dalziel sing than sing myself, any day! My musical talent stops at whistling 'Hail Columbia' and 'Rule Britannia,' I think."

"Carlos wisely divides his patriotism between his birthplace and his fatherland," observed Alfred.

"Well, I've good reason to love them both."

Geoffrey had been looking at Ina Cleve for the last few minutes. He broke in abruptly now:

"Well, I must be off. I've been idling about here

too long. Maybe I'll be back before you children quit," addressing Carlos and Christine, "but if not, good-bye."

He nodded, lifted his hat with a gesture of general leave-taking to all the circle, and walked away with his swift long quiet stride—the step that any one of them would now have recognised among a thousand.

Then Carlos, and Dora, and Christine, chatted and laughed and picked flowers, and made mutual floral offerings, as boys and girls amongst rose-bushes will do. Alfred pushed his hair off his brow reflectively, as if absorbed in evolving theories for the happiness of the human race. The children romped and pulled Ina Cleve's dress, and appealed to her about their play in eager trebles, and she answered their babble gently with absent eyes.

Geoffrey Atherdale did not return till rather late that night.

"Maria, you'll get quit of this tiresome fellow to-morrow," he observed. "To-morrow I turn out of this, bag and baggage."

"Turn out! Geoffrey, leave us? Why? where are you going?"

"Well, you see—I have fallen in with an old friend—Tom Lawson of Denver City. He's got rooms in Baker Street, and there's a nice set of rooms vacant just above his, so I have taken them."

"What, going to leave us, Uncle Geoffrey?" exclaimed Dora regretfully.

"Yes, little lady : that is so ! Uncle Geoffrey's off. I shall be a good deal here, though ; you'll not be quite rid of me. And I'll bring old Lawson up to see you."

Mrs. Atherdale assured him of the welcome any friend of his should receive : but expressed over and over again her surprise and regret at his leaving their house.

"What is your friend like ?" asked Dora curiously.

"Not a beauty, not a young lady's beauty, that is. Lost one eye by a flint arrow in a brush with the Pawnees, poor boy. He's forty-seven years of age besides.

"Oh," said Dora, and lost all interest.

Ina Cleve never entered into the conversation, nor uttered a regret or surprise at Geoffrey's intending departure. But, alone in her room, she seemed in no hurry to court sleep ; she lingered over her toilette, and walked absently up and down, regardless of the lateness of the hour.

"Why is he going away ?" she pondered with herself over and over again. "He is welcome ; he has seemed happy here ; they are all fond of him. Yet he will leave the house, he is going away from us. Why ? Is he tired of this quite life ? and he has not been here three weeks !"

She paused before the mirror. "What is it to *you* whether he goes or stays ?" she asked, addressing herself with more harshness of manner than her soft

voice ever expressed to others. "What difference can his going or staying make to *you*? You are not a sentimental school-girl; you are governess here; you are a widow; you will be twenty-seven next month, and you have lived your life. And yet you are thinking that it may be safer for you that he should be out of the house than in it. Safer! Ina Cleve, are you a fool? to think of your *safety* of heart, as if you were a girl, free and fresh of mind, with a heart to keep safe or to lose!





## CHAPTER VI.

### IN DANGER.

A grief which when you sang your best,  
Outsang you with its voice  
Chanting in pain, and long unrest,  
Its dirge for buried joys.—*Marston.*

**W**HEN Elma Dalziel arrived, on her second visit that summer, at Inkermann Villa, Geoffrey Atherdale was no longer an inmate there. Acting as usual on his sudden resolution, he had departed, bag and baggage, and taken up his abode with his friend Lawson. He had however promised to come in often and spend the evening, and kept his word.

On the evening of Elma's arrival, Carlos and Christine of course presented themselves. Geoffrey arrived later. He walked into the garden, informed by the servant that Mrs. Atherdale was there. There, in her usual rustic bench, she was sitting with Mrs. Cleve ; there were Letty and Lizzie playing on the lawn ; and there were Alfred and Christine lounging about.

From the inside of the house came snatches of song

and music. Dora and Elma were in the drawing-room trying over some duets ; and Carlos evidently had preferred accompanying the musical detachment to remaining with the garden-party. Geoffrey greeted the garden-party, and threw himself down on the grass beside the children. He offered his hands for Letty to tie with daisy-chains, and consented by special request to play at being a big dog chained up and eating a biscuit from Lizzie's fingers. If Geoffrey Atherdale ever looked restful and untroubled, it was when he was talking or playing with the children. With them he was always gentle, affectionate, and cheerful ; though his moods with men and women were fitful and often gloomy. Alfred and Christine were conversing, or rather Alfred talking, and Christine listening with attentive and appreciative eyes.

"Look round and you will see on every side how men live on the selfishness and weakness of mankind. The weakness of the age is its luxury—its vice its utter selfishness. Every man for himself, and none for mankind. Every man for his own advancement, his own profit, his own home's luxury, careless what gigantic evils his individual actions are helping, if ever so little, to increase. Because you can understand, Christine, that while one candle gives but a feeble flicker of light, a thousand make a glare. So the course of light that is harmless to the world in one man, is harmful when a thousand follow it."

"Oh yes, I see," said Christine. "But Alfred,

I don't suppose all people *think* as much as you do."

"Not *all*, perhaps ; but I fear I can't lay claim to be called a *thinker*," responded Alfred with graceful humility ; "that is a proud distinction, as yet beyond me. But I cannot help observing the absolute selfishness of human nature. The rich live too much on the oppression of the poor ; the poor live too often on the robbery of the rich. Trades pander to the luxury which already effeminates the land ; not one cares that he is burrowing his little rabbit-hole to undermine the already tottering strength of England. I am writing an essay on this subject, Christine. This worship of self and self-luxury—this limiting the bounds of one's thoughts, interests, and whole soul, to the horizon of one's own fireside—moves me much to a protest against it."

"You say true, Alfred," interposed Geoffrey. "The age *is* a selfish and luxurious one. Human nature has Self-worship for its very root and basis. But Christine's young to become a sceptic in that humanity which you and I, at our age, have found out."

Alfred—two and twenty years his uncle's junior—was a little puzzled, and scarcely flattered by the remark, on "*our* age."

"So you are all impressed by the extreme selfishness of this age," observed Ina Cleve. "I don't know, of course—but it has always seemed to me, in reading the histories of other ages and other nations,

that it would be difficult to point out an *unselfish* age, when people worshipped the general interest of the world, and trod their own individual interest under foot. I fancy that the amount of selfishness in all ages and all nations has been very much the same, shown of course in different guises, subject to different manners and customs."

"You are quite right after all, I think, Mrs. Cleve," said Geoffrey, with an attentive deference in his look and word he did not often manifest; "but I did not think you were a sceptic."

"Is it sceptical to believe that we are not so much worse than our great-grandfathers, or our neighbours over the water?"

Mrs. Atherdale was listening to the snatches of song that came floating out from the windows on the summer breeze.

"I think those two girls' voices go very well together," she observed. "I shall go in and listen to them. You needn't come, my dears, unless you like."

But they all did like. So in they all went, and entered the drawing-room in a troop.

Elma and Dora rose up from the piano as they entered; Carlos was putting up some music.

"Don't stop, dear girls; we have not come to interrupt you, but to listen," said Mrs. Atherdale. "Geoffrey, you have not seen Elma before, have you? No? Elma dear, this is my brother-in-law, Mr. Geoffrey Atherdale."

Elma bent her head with her usual pretty smile. Geoffrey bowed, but did not, as was his wont, stretch out his hand. His careworn brows involuntarily contracted as he looked at the girl. She bore a far stronger resemblance to her dead sister Viola than did the second sister, Ina Cleve, who was of a paler, more delicate type than either the brilliant pictured beauty that looked out of the morocco miniature case, or the equally brilliant and blooming living loveliness which Geoffrey Atherdale looked upon now—and, looking upon, did not draw near.

“Sing that pretty French duet,” said Mrs. Atherdale; and the two girls obeyed. Dora’s voice was weak and thin compared to Elma’s, which was rich and powerful, as well as sweet.

“Sing us a ballad now, Miss Dalziel, do!” entreated Carlos, when the French duet was over.

“Do, dear, a ballad; you sing them sweetly,” urged Mrs. Atherdale.

So a ballad—the sweet Scotch ballad of Jock o’ Hazeldean—was sung. Geoffrey Atherdale had taken a seat near to the piano, and listened with dutiful attention, and sometimes glanced on the young singer’s face, but glanced reluctantly, as if attracted in spite of himself. Carlos felt no such reluctance. He stood by ready to turn over the leaves if necessary; but as Elma sang from memory, his good intentions were futile; he listened with unconcealed

enjoyment, and looked down upon her face with admiration as unconcealed.

"Don't get up ; not just yet. You're not tired ? *One* more," he entreated ; and the request was echoed in chorus, for Elma's voice and style of singing were alike fascinating. She hesitated, then complied smilingly.

"Just one other, then," she agreed ; "and it shall be a pet ballad of mine. It's very old and quaint ; I don't know whether you will like it."

She struck a simple chord or two, and began to sing in her clear pathetic tones :

"When Troy Town for ten years' wars  
Withstood the Greeks in manful wise,  
Yet did their foes increase so fast,  
That to resist none could suffice."

Geoffrey Atherdale was sitting with downcast eyes and folded arms ; but before the first three words of the song were uttered, he glanced up with a sort of start, as if a jarring discord had suddenly hurt his ear.

"Troy Town" had been one of Viola Dalziel's favourite ballads : indeed, it was in an old music-book of hers that Elma had found it. This, Ina Cleve did not know ; but she was looking at Geoffrey, and noted the change in his face, though it was only a momentary change, that passed and left his stern features impassive and stern as ever. She knew, as surely as if he had told her, that the song struck on some painful

memory ; though she—a child when Viola died—did not know how often Viola had sung it to him, nor how like that long ago lost one her pet little sister Elma sang.

But Geoffrey knew it, and his deep-set grey eyes were riveted with strange intensity on Elma's face. Beautiful in Viola's style of beauty, her dark eyes and her blooming fair complexion the very counterpart of Viola's, her chestnut hair only a shade darker and less richly auburn in tint, Elma sang her sister's favourite ballad unconsciously in her sister's voice and style. There was a peculiar tremulous thrill in her voice, which pleased all her other listeners ; but which to Geoffrey was simply a maddening reminiscence of a voice that he alone remembered well, as she lingered on the falling cadences of the chorus :

“ Waste lie those walls that were so good,  
And corn now grows where Troy Town stood.”

“ Thank you, dear.” “ Charmingly sung,” and “ very pretty !” the audience said, in various tones of approval.

“ You'll sing that again to me often ; I like it ; I like it as much as you do,” said Carlos.

“ How do you know how much and to what exact degree I like it,” Elma responded gaily.

“ You said you liked it.”

“ Yes, but I didn't say how much. There are degrees in liking ; are you aware of that fact in natural history ?”

Geoffrey had uttered no word of compliment or thanks after the ballad. He sat looking at Elma still ; and every bright piquante glance her bewitching dark eyes flashed upon Carlos, deepened the shadow on Geoffrey's brow—a shadow, however, of which no one took particular note except Ina Cleve, and which was entirely lost on Miss Elma herself, who, aged eighteen years, considered Geoffrey Atherdale “quite old,” and wasted no attention on him while his nephews were by.

Geoffrey was grim and silent all the evening, and did not rouse into animation even when a plan which appeared to give great pleasure to the rest of the party was under discussion. This plan was that they should all go down to Devonshire in the course of a week or two, there to spend the remainder of the summer. It was proposed that Elma should stay with them until they started, and if possible accompany them on their holiday. Carlos, who of course was to join the excursion with his sister, entered into this plan with great delight. Geoffrey listened taciturnly to the young people chatting and anticipating ; the children noisy with glee, and Mrs. Atherdale kindly planning for them all. Ina Cleve appeared to him once :

“Of course you will come down to Devonshire too?”

“I don't know. Maybe,” he replied shortly.

Ina, naturally thinking herself repulsed and

"snubbed," repented having spoken to him at all, and did not utter another syllable to him all the evening. Nor did he to her until he was just departing ; then he came to her side.

"Are not you ever going to speak to me again? Was I rough to you? I didn't mean to be. Shake hands."

She gave him her hand, and naturally looked up at him as she did so ; but her eyes, as they had done before, sank instantly from his fixed gaze ; a faint colour rose in her cheeks and heightened her pale beauty as she released her hand from his.

"I wish he would not look at me so," thought she.

"Why will she not look at me?" wondered he.

And he tried to drive her out of his thoughts, and tried in vain.

The July days went on. Various little excursions in the neighbourhood of London were talked of, to wind up the early summer before the trip to Devonshire. Some of these holiday plans fell through, some were carried out. Amongst those successfully carried out, the most ambitious was a picnic at Burnham Beeches. It was a lovely morning when they drove down thither from London. They had chartered a "break" to hold twelve ; and as their own party only numbered ten, they had invited two young friends of Alfred's to join them—brothers of twenty and twenty-three.

For these youths Dora spread her harmless fragile

nets of words and smiles, sat between them, and used her sparkling eyes and her pretty laugh for their enslavement during the drive. Carlos, seated opposite beside his aunt, did not look altogether delighted to witness Dora's little flirtations. Christine, between Alfred and her uncle Geoffrey, was serenely happy; but Elma Dalziel, on Geoffrey's other side, had—it is to be feared—rather a dull time of it. Ina Cleve, pretty, modest, and quiet, with her veil pulled down, attended to the children, and amused them dutifully.

They were as happy a carriage full on the whole as any twelve persons together could hope to be; perhaps Dora and Christine—in their easily satisfied, and that day fully satisfied, girlhood—were the happiest of any. It is almost an impossibility for any twelve human hearts, collected together at any given time, to experience exactly the same degree of happiness. They all smile and talk with equal cheerfulness; but probably in every one the mental thermometer stands at a different degree. One heart marks only temperate, while another is rejoicing in summer heat.

The Burnham Beeches are grand and beautiful in every season, from the time when the little buds are swelling gently green; when the fading foliage is painted with all the rich colours of autumn; when the frost sparkles on the delicate tracery of the leafless boughs; or when, as on that summer day, the bright

green leaves expand over the huge gnarled ancient trunks, clothing them lovingly, crowning them proudly.

The summer was at its zenith ; the sun was at its height. The light broke through the branches and danced and flickered fairylike upon the rugged roots and on the mossy ground, whereon more than one merry company had that day elected to spread their meal and picnic.

Under one of the largest trees, the Atherdales had laid their table-cloth, on a spot evidently popular for the purpose, as divers old champagne corks and broken soda-water bottles scattered around bore witness. If there could have been found any objection to the spot, it could only have been on the score of its proximity to another picnic party, whose songs and laughter were somewhat too audible ; but this nobody minded.

Carlos was comforting himself, in the lack of Dora—more than comforting himself indeed, both apparently and genuinely—with Elma Dalziel. Dora might look down as coyly and up as coquettishly at either or both of her young cavaliers as she pleased, Carlos had literally for the hour forgotten all about her. He and Elma were whispering and laughing confidentially ; and Geoffrey Atherdale keeping a quiet watchful eye upon them both.

“ I haven’t been at English sea-side places much,” Carlos was saying. “ But do you know what I think is the jolliest part of this Devonshire plan ? ”

"No."

"Why, our being altogether—I mean, *you* being there."

"Now that's not true; you don't mean that last," said Elma, with a scarcely perceptible glance at Dora. which, with its inference, was entirely lost upon Carlos.

"I always mean what I say, unless I'm joking," he added conscientiously.

"Then I suppose you joke very often."

"No, I'm not good at being amusing, like some fellows."

"And you do not really tell many fibs?" said Elma, with a sweet inquiring smile.

"Now, you look here," said Carlos, becoming confidential, and lapsing, as he was wont when interested, into a more decidedly "over the water" accent than usual, "I like the people I like to rate me at just what I'm worth. You ask any fellow if I ever lost my grip on anything trusted to me, or if I ever told a lie. Yes, by-the-bye," he went on, with a boyish vanity that was too simple and unaffected to be offensive, "I did tell a big lie once, and I don't care. I'd tell it again."

"What was it about?"

"Why, it was a boy. He'd run away, and they were after him. I knew he'd get an awful hiding if they caught him, and he asked me not to tell that I'd met him, and I promised. So they came and asked me, and hectoring me, and I told them I didn't know anything about him. I did, you know."

"Then I am afraid you scarcely deserve the unblemished character for truth you were claiming just now," said Elma demurely. "Wasn't it Washington who never told a lie? I'm sorry to find that you are so far behind him. Now I am only chaffing!" she added, suddenly changing her tone and lowering her voice bewitchingly. "I rather admire you for that one fib. I am sure the boy you helped would give you the best of characters, and not a better one than you deserve. There! now I think it's reversing the codes of society for *me* to pay *you* compliments!"

And Elma blushed a little; blushes were not extremely common to her, but they were wonderfully becoming; and Carlos had the audacity to tell her so, and thereby to deepen the blush and heighten the beauty.

"Who was the boy?" she asked presently, Eve-like, inquisitive.

"Why, I'm not going to tell you that."

"Not? Why not?"

"Well, what could you want to know for?"

"Not to advertise it in the public papers, nor to do any harm," she said rather petulantly. "Tell me, please."

Carlos shook his head smiling.

"Tell me," repeated Elma, surprised at being refused. "Well, I wouldn't hear now if you wanted to tell me!" she added, with another flash of petulance, turning her shoulder to him.

"But I *don't* want to tell you," replied Carlos laughing; "I'd make you hear if I did. I can shout pretty loud."

"It's no good being cross with you," said Elma, unable to resist a smile, and instantly becoming her sunny self again.

Geoffrey Atherdale noted all this episode. He was sitting between his two little nieces, and seemingly devoting himself to amusing them; but his eyes kept turning to Carlos and Elma. When the company rose up and wandered away amongst the Beeches, and, wandering, broke up into twos and threes, he observed that Elma and Carlos were two. Geoffrey found his way somehow to Ina's side; Letty and Lizzie having run on after Dora and her party, left their governess free and alone.

"Your sister is very beautiful," Geoffrey remarked to Ina, in a tone less of compliment than of cold criticism and reluctant appreciation.

"Perhaps I ought not to say so, but I think she is."

"You ought to say so if you think so; there's no merit in mock modesty. She's very pretty—not a bit like you." Ina smiled quietly. "That sounded rude, didn't it?" added Geoffrey, "but you know it was not meant to be rude."

"It was far more pleasant than silly and untrue compliments. I like truth much better than flattery; and I have eyes to appreciate Elma's youth and beauty," she replied.

"And eyes too to value your own," he said. "All women have. You know that you are as lovely as Elma: you know that I know it; and you know that what I meant was that you are moon and sun—lily and rose. You have the face of an angel—the nature too, I think. She has the eyes that work devil's work."

Ina looked at him, surprised at speech so plain, yet not displeased.

"In every man there's a fiend," he went on. "There's no worse fiend in us wild dwellers on the border than sleeps undiscovered under the respectable broadcloth of this civilisation of yours. There's no more dangerous fire than is lurking latent in the human beings round us. Eyes like that girl's wake up the devil." He paused a moment; Ina was about to speak, when he added brusquely, "Not only eyes like hers! I've known innocent faces like yours to do work just as bad. Just as the sight of heaven makes hell hotter, you women curse men's lives."

"If we work mischief unconsciously and unintentionally," she replied, "it is our misfortune, not our fault. It is unjust to blame a woman for any misfortune she may involuntarily cause. I have not a bad opinion of my own sex. I do not like to hear a woman abuse women, any more than a man depreciate men."

"But I, as a man, am privileged to depreciate women—is that so?"

"If you think so badly of us."

"I don't think badly of your sort of women. I would only avoid you because of the danger of thinking too well of you."

Ina felt embarrassed; Geoffrey himself seemed to think he was going far enough, for he changed the subject abruptly.

"Now I wonder where that young scapegrace of a nephew of mine and your sister have got to. They have outstripped us."

"They are younger and lighter footed," observed Ina.

"And lighter hearted. I guess this trail will lead us to them," said Geoffrey, striking into a narrow path that apparently led nowhere. Ina followed him trustfully; but at last questioned, "Where are we going to?"

"Why, to look up those young people. There they are. See!"

Ina looked, and looked again, but saw no sign of the truants. At length, as she drew nearer the trees in the direction he indicated, she caught sight of what might have been a large white bird perched up in a fork between two branches, but which wore a wide straw hat with blue ribbons, and a white piqué dress fluttering wing-like over the branch. Elma made a very pretty picture in her elevated position; her fair, softly-coloured, girlish beauty showing well by contrast with the time-scarred gnarled and rugged trunk against which she leant.

"Elma ! my dear Elma ! how ever did you get up there ? how will you get down ? and where is Carlos ?" said Ina, standing amazed looking up into the tree.

"I helped her up, and I'll lift her down," shouted the well-known voice from the topmost branches, where Ina, glancing up, perceived Carlos, half hidden among the leaves.

"He's all right," said Geoffrey, smiling, as she seemed a little alarmed for him. Carlos clambered down, with the activity of a monkey or a squirrel, from his loftier perch to the fork where Elma sat.

"Won't you come up, Mrs. Cleve ? Do ; I'll pull you up ; it's so jolly," he invited hospitably, balancing himself on about two inches of branch at Elma's side.

Mrs. Cleve declined the kind offer with thanks.

"Aren't they two great babies !" she observed, smiling withal affectionately up at the young people, whose air of complete comfort and self-satisfaction was indeed irresistible.

"Now you gymnastically-inclined children had better come down," added Mrs. Cleve ; and watched their descent with some anxiety. Elma, light as a bird, found foothold on every knot of the gnarled trunk, and assisted from above by Carlos, arrived safe and erect, though with dust-begrimed hands, on terra firma, looking half amused and half ashamed of herself. Carlos swung himself down with a velocity that quite alarmed Ina.

"After that feat, I shall cease to be surprised at the leg of mutton and greased pole," she observed.

"We had better be making our way back ; it's going to blow up a shower," said Geoffrey. "This will take us a short cut."

"How do you know? I thought you had never been in the Burnham Beeches before, Mr. Atherdale?" said Elma, opening her eyes. Geoffrey smiled.

"How do we find our way in the backwoods of the West? Very few highroads or signposts there, Miss Elma," he said, as he led the way.

Although the "cut" was short, the rain came down before they reached the general rendezvous, and drove them for shelter into a hollow tree, to await the passing over of the storm, which Geoffrey said would be only a violent shower.

Carlos and Elma took up their position in the cavern of the time-hollowed tree with delight. It had been a giant of the forest once, and was now a ruined hollow shell, with gaping splits in the decaying bark wide enough to serve as doorways to the shelter-seekers, all four of whom found place within. Ina gathered her skirts together and bent her head, considerate of her bonnet. Elma stood radiant and smiling, and flushed with exercise and pleasure, at her side. The contrasted beauties rivalled but did not eclipse each other.

"Say, Uncle Geoff, don't that make a pretty picture?" said Carlos, with an eye for the artistic, regard-

ing the two fair faces against the rugged rough background.

"Too pretty," replied Geoffrey grimly. And then he stood silent and with a clouded brow; while Carlos and Elma, oblivious of his disapproval, chattered and laughed; and when Ina's gentle voice appealed to him, he left it unanswered, absorbed in the one thought,

"This must be stopped."





## CHAPTER VII.

### A RETREAT.

Let them part !  
She with the gifts of a gracious bearing :  
He with the pangs of a passionate heart.

—*Joaquin Miller.*

**T**WO mornings after the picnic at Burnham Beeches, Geoffrey Atherdale walked into the room where Carlos and Christine were yet lingering over their last piece of muffin and final sip of coffee. Carlos had the morning's paper in his hand ; Christine was giving bits of bread and butter to the cat, who had lived well since these extravagant young people came to lodge at Mrs. Smedley's, and encouraged the presence of Pussy at all meals—a habit in no way discouraged by Mrs. Smedley. Geoffrey took one chair, and put his feet upon another, and declined all the hospitable offers his nephew and niece cordially lavished upon him. He let the cat come on his knee and rub its head affectionately against his waistcoat ; for though some human beings said they were “afraid of his stern

rough ways," there was never an animal that did not come trustfully to Geoffrey Atherdale as to a friend.

"I want a few words with you, Carlos," he said presently. "Run off, Christine, and leave your brother to me a little."

Carlos wondered on what subject the few words were to be; but as his uncle did not seem in any hurry to avail himself of Christine's departure by commencing the conversation, Carlos opened it himself.

"I had a letter last night from Trevelyan. And as soon as the long vacation's over there will be a place vacant, and I'm to be taken on. I'll be back from Devonshire long before that, you know."

"Back from Devonshire! Yes. Now that's just what I've got to say to you. A quiet sleepy English country place can't give you the change you want, my boy, when you have been mewed up in this smoky city for so many months. I am off next week on a grand tour. I'm going to Norway and Sweden, and down through Germany and Switzerland to Italy. I'm going to cut across into Greece, and maybe push on to Egypt. Now, Carlos, boy! give up Devonshire, and come with me!"

"I'd like it, you know, Uncle Geoff; but I couldn't—how could I? I've fixed it all up with them to go to Devonshire."

"They may change; they are not going yet. Anyhow, they'll let you off; they'll offer no hindrance to

old Geoffrey's having his way. It will be a fine tour, and you and I, boy, would enjoy it well. We may 'do' all Europe if we like, and come back whenever we're tired."

Geoffrey watched his nephew narrowly, thinking, was he safe still? or was the mischief done? No; the mischief was not very serious in Carlos's case. The thoughts of Elma and Devonshire in one scale, and of the European round in the other, balanced almost equally. He did not utter his hesitation, but hesitated.

"Think, Carlos, we'd have a good time," observed his uncle, reading his reflections.

"That I'm sure we should. But the place? Trevelyan's office? I shouldn't be back in time."

"Hang the place; the place only means money. Carlos, need your father's son talk of money to me?"

"It isn't the money. Christine and I get on very well. But Christine, what will she do?"

"She'll go with them, and be happy in a sweet, quiet, womanly way. And you'll go with me and see new places, and keep moving or stop still, as we choose. Come, boy! you haven't forgotten our last journey together? We'll have horses; we'll ride again. Do you remember our ride down from Bridger's Pass?"

"Don't I!" exclaimed Carlos, tilting up and balancing his chair on two legs in the excitement of the recollection. Then in a very few minutes one

of the scales went down, and the other was found light, and Geoffrey Atherdale had won.

Then they planned the tour together, and Elma receded into the background of her young admirer's thoughts, as fast as the impression of "Paul and Virginia"—which he had read and been affected by—had faded before the more thrilling interest of the exciting pages of the "Scalp Hunters," and as, in his nature, full of immature energies and youthful high spirits, sentiment always faded before adventure. And Geoffrey Atherdale congratulated himself on having struck the blow in the nick of time.

"He will forget his fancy for her—if he really had a fancy—long before I bring him back," he thought.

Was it a danger created only by Geoffrey's imagination? or was Carlos really running the risk of a serious and lasting attachment to Elma Dalziel?

If so, was it merely through a boy's natural inclination and admiration for a beautiful face? or was it through the working of a strange decree of fate? Geoffrey naturally could not shake this latter idea from his mind; for he was fanciful and superstitious by nature. He did not like his superstitions to be noticed; but to those who watched him they were evident. Little things—absurd in their triviality—would disturb him. If a bird lit on the window-sill he would try to dissuade any one from going on any excursion that day. Once, when he met a coffin and bearers in the street, he was all day evidently uneasy

and watching for something to happen. And his superstitions were not only in trifles; in the most important questions some old fancy or tradition would work upon his susceptible imagination. His fanciful and somewhat morbid fatalism mingled and contrasted strangely with his unerring perceptions, his keen and subtle observance of motive and character, and his shrewd business common sense.

He held Carlos almost as dear as a son, and meditated upon his fancy for Elma perhaps more seriously than it needed. "It would look like Destiny if the boy were really to lose his heart in that quarter," he reflected often. "I'd take him right away back across the Atlantic into the very jaws of the war, sooner than let him do that. And yet if Fate *is* working it so, I should no sooner have got the boy out among the trenches, than I should find this girl there as a hospital nurse! However, I'll do what I can."

The Atherdales were surprised and disappointed to hear of the proposed grand tour. Their surprise, however, was only brief; they were learning never to be really surprised at any step, however sudden, which Geoffrey Atherdale might choose to take. Elma, who knew the least of him, was the most surprised, and perhaps, secretly, one of the most disappointed. She had not expected Carlos to fail of joining the Devonshire party, whatever that strange uncle of his might have pleased to do. Whether Carlos wished

to express any regrets to her or not, she gave him no opportunity of doing so. She drew Alfred Atherdale to her side with one half-glance over her shoulder; she talked to him with her most animated sweetness; she listened to him with a pretty deference that pleased him well.

Dora spoke out her vexation that her uncle and cousin would not go with them, and reproached Geoffrey, half coaxingly, half pettishly, telling him "it was a shame to take Carlos away."

"Never mind, little maid. I'll bring him back," said Geoffrey good-naturedly.

To Ina Cleve he talked very little now, and never discussed with her, or even alluded to, his change of plans. But she had an intuitive insight into his motive—half his motive, that is—in setting off on this journey now. She suspected that Carlos and Elma agreed too well together to please him; she felt that the last thing in the world he desired for his nephew was any entanglement with her sister; she instinctively hit upon the truth that to take Carlos away from the temptation of Elma's society, was a motive in the plan of the journey. But of Geoffrey's other motive—the motive of putting himself, as well as Carlos, out of the way of temptation—Ina had no real suspicion. If the idea had ever flitted across her mind, she banished it as a piece of absurd and ludicrous vanity, and laughed at herself with a scornful contempt which she reserved for herself, and with

which she treated no other living creature. Yet this second motive was as strong as the first with Geoffrey. Elma's bright and girlish beauty inspired him only with painful associations and a desire to withdraw Carlos from her influence. But Ina's pure and peaceful loveliness—the loveliness of a mild and mellow summer evening—attracted him magically ; her deep soft eyes, her low and winning voice, aroused all the sleeping passion, and re-animated the crushed out and trampled down romance of his soul, calling up from their grave the powers of feeling which he had thought were long dead and coldly confined for ever. It was from her for his own sake that he wished to fly, as well as for Carlos's sake from Elma.

Alfred Atherdale heard of the change of plan with a little shrug of his shoulders. He did not particularly regret the loss of Carlos's company in Devonshire ; but he was scarcely well satisfied that his uncle Geoffrey, his bachelor uncle, the wealthiest member of the family, should go on his travels, taking Carlos as the companion of his choice. He never however commented on Geoffrey's taste, and he was in no way surprised at Carlos's readiness to bear his uncle company.

“Carlos has one of those flighty natures constantly craving for change and excitement,” he observed.

“He is but a boy after all, and is full of restless energies, that must find some field,” observed Ina Cleve.

"And the field they now find is pleasure travelling, and that I am afraid is all the field that his energies ever will find," responded Alfred. "Travelling to him means merely moving about; he knows no object beyond the purely physical pleasure of perpetually changing the scene. Historical interests and ancient associations simply do not exist for him."

"Poor Carlos's education has naturally been neglected," said Mrs. Atherdale; "but he seems to me to have quick perceptions and intelligence."

"Yes, my dear mother, he has powers of perception, but none of reflection. He will perceive a thing but not reflect upon it; he will form two ideas clearly enough, but fail in drawing any deduction from their relation to each other."

"I do not think myself that he is gifted with any remarkable intellect," admitted even Carlos's staunch ally, Ina Cleve.

"No, he will never set the Thames on fire, poor boy!" said Alfred, good humouredly. "I think it is a pity his mind should be disturbed and distracted by travelling just now, when he was about to settle down; and of course Trevelyan won't keep the place for him. Still it is quite natural Carlos should jump at this opportunity; I dare say it will be a treat for him; and Uncle Geoffrey's wish of course could not be slighted," added uncle Geoffrey's other nephew, who would himself have dutifully sacrificed his Devonshire holiday, or any other, to please his uncle.

The evening before Geoffrey and Carlos were to start on their travels, they of course spent at Mrs. Atherdale's.

"Here we are, all together! for the last time for—how many months, I wonder?" said Carlos, addressing the company in general, but looking at Elma Dalziel.

"It may be years before *I* meet all the present party again," that young lady observed.

"*May* be! *Must not* be," rejoined Carlos, with a light-hearted trust in the pleasant, and defiance of the disagreeable, possibilities of the future. "Come, Dora, this chair is for you," he added, pointing to one near Elma; and then laying hands on the music-stool, as being the most portable seat, he swung it to the table, placed it between the two girls, and installed himself in that desirable situation between the cross-lightnings of those two pairs of bright eyes.

"Satan finds some mischief still  
For idle hands to do,"

quoted Elma Dalziel. "You are determined *your* hands shall never get into any mischief. Can you ever see a paper-knife without playing with it?"

"So that I don't stab any one with it, what does it matter?" rejoined Carlos, nevertheless laying down his plaything.

"I like that paper-knife, and I like the motto upon it," said Elma, inspecting the hilt of oxydised silver, and the curved blunt blade which bore engraved in old English letters, "*Sans peur et sans reproche.*"

"It's one of our family mottoes, isn't it?" said Dora, appealing to Carlos.

"Yes, the one I like best," he replied. "It was my father's motto. He took this paper-knife from Saxby Towers when he went to America. I remember it when I was a little boy. Then Uncle Geoff had it; and he brought it to England with him."

"It's quite a family heirloom," remarked Dora.

"*'Sans peur et sans reproche'* is one of my favourite mottoes. I wish the family joy of it," said Elma.

"I'll keep it as my especial motto," said Carlos, his blue eyes brightening with an expression a little deeper than pleasure as he met Elma's friendly smile. "It always seems to me," he added, "that a fellow without fear is a long way towards being without reproach."

"That position does not appear to me to be tenable, Carlos," interposed Alfred, drawing near to join in the conversation. "Mere bodily courage—the animal fearlessness of the gamecock and the bulldog—is one of the qualities that half the ruffians and scoundrels on earth may possess, and which, possessing, they generally misuse."

"I don't mean mere bull-dog courage," responded Carlos, "I mean courage every way. A fellow who's brave mentally as well as physically, is straightforward and open, and has the courage to despise any hidings or sneakings or double dealings. And a man without

fear of that sort is very likely, it seems to me, to be without reproach."

"The argument is not without force as far as it goes," admitted Alfred condescendingly, "but it loses sight of the fact there are other reproaches in the world beside cowardice and sneakings."

"But none worse, I think."

"Well, there I must really beg leave to differ," said Alfred, lifting his eyes with gentle superiority.

"The worst stains and reproaches, I believe, have their root in moral cowardice or weakness. And weakness *is* cowardice," replied Carlos, standing his ground manfully.

"You speak with the easy scorn and assertion of an untried strength," said Alfred, with a grave parental air.

"Well, I couldn't prove my strength with *words* anyhow," rejoined Carlos smiling, but with something of hauteur in his look; "it's a poor strength that can't wait for deeds to prove it."

"Very true, my dear Carlos," said Alfred, gracefully agreeing.

"Yes," assented Elma also, looking at Carlos with a genuine enthusiasm and sympathy in her dark limpid eyes.

"We'll take this paper-knife with us," said Carlos, his attention entirely turned from Alfred and intently fixed on Elma. "And when I read the motto, I'll remember you like it; and when I use it, I'll always think of you."

"Oh, make no rash promises!" cautioned Elma gaily, but with unusual softness in her merry smile.

"And when will you think of *me*, Carlos?" inquired Dora, with her childish air of simple coquetry. "Never, I suppose?"

"A great deal oftener than *you* will of *me*, I dare say," he answered.

"Oh, will you!" said Dora, shaking her head in absolute refutation of the idea.

"Well, if you do think of me, show it by writing often! That will be real jolly, to have nice little letters by every mail!" he said, stealing a glance at Elma, and wishing that she were his cousin too, and that the proprieties, whose rule he was just beginning to comprehend, would permit him to invite her to join in the correspondence. He had never thought Elma Dalziel so charming, nor looked forward with such confident pleasure to meeting her again on his return from the Continental tour, as his last evening in her company. Geoffrey noted this, and reflected with satisfaction that the next day would put the sea between the two who seemed this evening more dangerously drawn towards each other than ever. Carlos always liked Dora, and showed that he liked her; but there was a difference between his manner to her and his manner to Elma, which no one noticed or took the trouble to observe save his uncle Geoffrey.

The two travellers were to leave London early on the following morning; Christine was to remain with

her aunt and cousins, and go with them to the sea-side in the beginning of August ; it was then the end of July. The whole family flocked out of the dining-room, after a light supper, to see the departing travellers off. Mrs. Atherdale embraced them and bade them farewell on the threshold ; the younger members of the family swarmed round them to the gate.

While Carlos was parting from Dora with a cousinly kiss and a promise to write soon, while the children clung about Geoffrey, and Alfred called them to order for pulling their uncle's coat, Ina Cleve and her sister Elma stood a little way off on the gravel path. They had been irresistibly drawn after the departing guests out into the garden ; they would willingly have followed them to the very gate ; but they felt that they two alone were not of the family group ; their claim to mingle in it now was of courtesy, not of kindred. Yet, perhaps, not one heart there beat as sadly as Ina Cleve's ; and even Elma's bright spirit was not unshadowed by a secret regret ; still they both stood aloof. But they were not allowed to remain so long. Carlos made one stride towards them, and seized a hand of each.

"Excuse left hand. I haven't got two rights," he apologised, as he wrung the two hands he had made captive, warmly.

"But there's no need for you to shake hands with us both together, is there ?" laughed Elma.

Then Geoffrey came up.

"Sorry to cut your farewells short, Carlos. Good-bye, Miss Elma," and Geoffrey shook hands politely with Elma, then turned to Ina Cleve. He looked at her for a minute while he held her hand, and battled sternly and silently with the almost resistless impulse to lift it to his lips.

Then he conquered himself, said stiffly and coldly, "Good-bye, Mrs. Cleve," released, with scarcely a pressure, the slender hand he would have given at that minute half a world to kiss, and left her with that brief and sternly-formal farewell.

Which of the two suffered most in that one minute of parting?

If he was cruel to her, he was cruel also to himself.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### FOILED.

O passion-tossed and bleeding past,  
Part now, part well, part wide apart,  
As ever ships on ocean slid !

—*Joaquin Miller.*



OVER the pier at Havre a fresh west wind is blowing ; at sea long waves are rolling and swelling, and breaking into light lines of foam ; in the harbour the green water heaves and splashes softly against the jetties and the pier. The sky is a mass of broken clouds, between which here and there shine glimpses of the eternal blue beyond. The sun now and then finds his way out and dazzles the eyes of the sky-gazers, and then gets lost in the wilderness of cloud again.

In the morning light a great steamer is moving grandly out of the harbour. The people on the pier follow her as she glides along, slowly at first, then faster, faster. They try to keep up with her ; they rush along the pier, a motley crowd. Weather-beaten French sailors, a few British tourists, peasants in their

clean carefully darned blouses, and women in their starched white Normandy caps. Some of the men run fast, but the steamer outstrips the swiftest. Before they reach the end of the pier she is out at sea, with a long line of white foam tossing on the waves in her wake.

“Qui est elle ? où est-ce qu’elle vais ?” demanded a young tourist in a grey wide-awake, with an accent as open to hostile criticism as his grammar. He referred to the steamer ; and a French sailor answered him, “Elle est pour le Brésil, monsieur !”

“She’s for Brazil, Uncle Geoff,” reported the young traveller to his companion, who stood with his arms folded watching the vessel.

“Bound right away for Brazil, is she ? Now, Carlos, boy ! that makes my heart leap. It’s the one thing left on earth to stir me, I think, to see that giant go ploughing her path right straight through the waves—a moving city—for six thousand miles ! Why can’t we sail on an eternal voyage and never touch land ?”

“Flying Dutchman business ! Would that suit you ?” responded Carlos.

“Well, I have been a kind of Flying Dutchman all my life,” observed Geoffrey moodily.

It is nearly fourteen months now since the two Atherdales, uncle and nephew, left their relatives in London, and started on their European tour. They have remained away longer than Carlos at least had expected to do ; they have carried out all their original

plans, and a few extra ones. They have run through Norway, Sweden, Germany, and Italy, Sicily and Spain, in sublime ignorance of even the rudiments of the languages of those nations. They have spent a winter in Egypt, a spring in Greece, and a summer in Switzerland, during which they ascended Mont Blanc, and had their fill of mountaineering. They have now, in September, arrived at Havre from Paris. They have heard at intervals from the home-staying Atherdales at Inkermann Villa, and found letters from Dora and Mrs. Atherdale, which had been awaiting them some time in Paris.

These letters contained a little picture done by a travelling photographer—a rough portrait of the family group assembled in their own garden, with the walls of Inkermann Villa as the background. This photograph Carlos has taken possession of, and keeps in his pocket, somewhat damaged by contact with loose tobacco and a wine-flask. Geoffrey had smiled and seemed pleased when he first saw the little picture, in which the tall, slender, black-robed figure of Ina Cleve stood out gracefully prominent against the white walls of the villa. He had pored over it and studied it carefully, and then thrown it over to Carlos, and spoken of it or of that fireside, which the two wanderers called often “home,” no more. The letters and picture had vividly recalled the familiar faces to Carlos, filled him with pleasant anticipations, and inspired him with a glad sense of home-going, now that

only the Channel lay between him and England. But Geoffrey now seems reluctant to talk of going back, and has been moody and thoughtful. He is not generally a very lively companion ; but Carlos is sincerely attached to him, and is not always talkatively inclined himself ; so the two strangely-mated fellow-voyagers—the one brimming full of youth, hope and trust, and buoyant sanguine spirits, the other older than his five-and-forty years, sad and strange and careworn—travel together on the best and friendliest of terms.

“ There’s a vessel on Saturday for New York,” observed Geoffrey.

“ Is there ?” said his nephew, not thinking the fact of the least importance.

“ I shall sail by that, I think,” said Geoffrey, quietly.

“ Carlos, boy, would you like to sail too ?”

“ To New York ! But I am going *home*—back to them—to London, that is. Uncle Geoff ! you’ll go back to them too ?”

“ No. What’s the use ? If I went back it would only be for a little while. Look, Carlos, I’ve seen them all. I can carry the recollection of them away with me. Why should I see them again ? How can their peaceful home-life mix with *mine* ?”

“ You liked it. Did you or I ever have a quieter, more peacefully happy time, than last summer with them in England ?”

“ Perhaps not. Go *you* back to them, Carlos.

Knit up your life into the smooth unbroken line of home-life if you can. That is happiest. But there's no such smooth resting-place in the world for me. A happy home blisters my heart to look on it! Carlos! whenever you see what looks like a bright oasis in your life, turn away from it. Leave the sweet fruit growing on the tree."

"I don't think I would do that, Uncle Geoff. I would gather it and possess it anyhow, and run the risk of its turning out a Dead Sea apple."

"I suppose you would," his uncle admitted. "That's human nature. And when you had eaten it and tasted the ashes, you would let tempting fruit alone from that day henceforth for ever!"

"You think," said Carlos, after a minute's thought, his clear keen blue eyes searching Geoffrey's face, "that I shall find the ashes under the tempting surface of that little home out yonder?" indicating the quarter where beyond the horizon England lay.

"I've no reason to think that, boy. You and I were born under different stars. But it's not well for me to go back there; the planets say so!" added Geoffrey in a lighter tone.

They walked homeward together, along the pier, and took their way beside the beach to Frascati's Hotel, where they were staying.

On the terrace on the sea-side of that hotel, many people were partaking of breakfast or luncheon at little tables, combining material refreshment with sea-

breezes and a sea-view. A little ragged Savoyard outside the railings, with a concertina of feeble and melancholy note, was annoying their ears with a depressing melody, accompanied by a dismal and monotonous appeal for "*un petit sou.*"

Near to the railing, at one of the tables to hold half-a-dozen, were sitting a family in evident travelling costume. The four ladies, of whom two were very young, all wore green gauze veils ; the one gentleman of the party bore the British tourist badge of a black-cased field-glass slung by a strap over his shoulder. One of the green-veiled young girls rose up and leant over the railing to drop a few sous into the little Savoyard's hand, and, so doing, caught sight of Geoffrey and Carlos coming towards them, a few yards off.

"Oh ! there they are !" she exclaimed with a little cry of delight. At the exclamation her own party looked up simultaneously, as if receiving a piece of pleasant news which they had been expecting. But Geoffrey and Carlos stopped as simultaneously, stricken dumb for the moment with astonishment. The last thing in the world which *they* had expected was to hear Christine's voice hail them, and Dora instantly echo the welcome, and to see Mrs. Atherdale, Alfred, and Mrs. Cleve, sitting at their breakfast on the terrace at Frascati's.

"We were waiting for you ! we have been looking for you !" announced the two young girls in chorus,

as they ran to meet their much-surprised uncle and his companion.

"Why, little ladies! have you dropped from the skies?" inquired Geoffrey.

"How on earth did you get here?" asked Carlos, with a delighted greeting.

"We got here by the Southampton boat," said Christine.

"And it was so rough crossing," added Dora.

Mrs. Atherdale and Alfred made room at their table for Carlos and Geoffrey with a warm welcome. Ina Cleve met Geoffrey quietly, and Carlos with cordial kindness. Geoffrey's eyes brightened with an involuntary joy and tenderness as he looked upon her again, but he forced himself soon to turn his gaze away from her, towards anything and everything but the one face on which he longed to look.

"Well now, what has brought you all here?" he inquired, when the hubbub of salutations and greeting was over.

"Alfred has a commission in Paris; he is sent over on some literary business; and I thought as I had not been in Paris for a long time, and as the children were down at Brighton, and we were all wanting a change, that we might as well all come. And then we intended to look for you both here and in Paris; and when we got to this hotel we asked the waiters, and found you were here," explained Mrs. Atherdale.

"And if you had come three days later you would have found I was not here," observed Geoffrey. "I would most likely have been off to New York—the boats go from here, and it would have been a good chance."

"New York! Go to America without coming back to England!" chorussed the different female voices all in a key of astonishment.

"But *you* were not going, Carlos?" added Dora and Christine simultaneously.

The serene brightness of Ina Cleve's face had faded suddenly when Geoffrey spoke of New York; but she was the only one who uttered no exclamation—expressed no interest. He was looking at her, and noticed how the smile died off her lips.

"Yes, I was going to send the boy back to you alone," he said. "But my plans are not fully formed. Maybe I go—maybe I don't."

"Oh, Geoffrey, don't go! we have not seen you for so long! Stay with us," urged Mrs. Atherdale.

"Don't tempt me," he said, and smiled.

After breakfast, there ensued a general exhibition of rooms, every one of the party wishing to know where every one else was quartered. Along corridors and up and downstairs they followed each other, until every one's place of domicile had been criticised or admired.

Geoffrey and Carlos lingered talking to Mrs. Atherdale in her little salon some minutes after Alfred,

Dora, and Mrs. Cleve had vanished away to their different apartments.

"Now, by the bye, Geoffrey, I want to put you *au fait* with some ideas of ours," said Mrs. Atherdale presently, with some little hesitation. "Well, we'll spare Christine's blushes," she added, looking at her niece. "Run away, Chrissy, if you like."

But Christine, although she blushed, did not run away; she drew closer to Geoffrey and Carlos, nestling to her uncle's side, and taking her brother's hand.

"Say, what's up?" asked the latter.

"The fact is," continued Mrs. Atherdale, "my Alfred has—has—It's only just made clear, but we find that these two young people—my boy and my little Christine—can't get on without each other; and so, it has been arranged somehow—That some day—"

"Is that so?" said Geoffrey, gravely and kindly, while Carlos, staring with frank surprise and inquiry into his sister's downcast face, observed—

"Why, you baby, do you mean to say you want to go and get married?"

"Not just yet, of course," replied Mrs. Atherdale for her niece. "But I really see no reason why, as they are so much attached to each other, they should not some day make their way in the world together. They are young, of course; but Alfred is more thoughtful than his years, and I myself was married when I was little more than Christine's age."

"I am turned seventeen now, you know, Carlos," said Christine, appealingly. "You don't mind, dear Carlos, do you?"

"Mind, little sister! Why, anything that makes you happy, I like. And we'll all be brothers and sisters! I'll be Dora's brother," exclaimed Carlos, revelling in the pleasant anticipations of the involved relationships the prospective alliance would form.

"Well, this little girl will be a treasure," said Geoffrey, smoothing her fair hair tenderly. "I wish Master Alfred joy."

Mrs. Atherdale was glad that Geoffrey approved of the engagement. In her secret heart she had felt a little fear lest he might "throw cold water upon it." And although Geoffrey's disapproval would not have been supposed, and could not have been admitted, to have any effect, yet his sister-in-law would have been sorry for her son to contract a marriage of which his uncle, owner of Saxby Towers, disapproved.

Mrs. Atherdale and her party were going on to Paris the next day. It did not take much persuasion now to induce Geoffrey and Carlos to join them and return to that city, which they had only just left. Indeed, Carlos needed no persuasion at all, and Geoffrey less than might have been expected. They had not stayed long in Paris as they passed through it, and the temptation of seeing the sights there in the company of the rest of the family would have drawn them to return on their route a longer journey than

four and a half hours' express. For Geoffrey, having met the family to whom he had resolved never to return, resigned himself to the Fates. At the very time when he had been making up his mind to sail for America, they had been on their way to find him out. In the very port whence he had thought to sail, on the very morning when he had told his plan to Carlos, the well-known voices he had thought so far off had welcomed him. Geoffrey's superstitious nature recognised the hand of Destiny in this. As he had crossed their path again, he might as well travel a little way with them. So he let himself drift along to Paris. The fascination which Ina Cleve involuntarily exercised over him, he found was in no way weakened by the effect of his fourteen months' absence. She was as beautiful, as graceful, and youthful-looking as ever; her voice stole to his heart with the same subtle charm; her eyes appealed innocently, and unconsciously, to all the tenderness and passion of his nature, just as before. Quite in vain he had endeavoured to forget her, quite in vain hoped that exile from her presence would banish her haunting face from his mind's eye. And she felt as he felt; sought forgetfulness like him, and failed like him; and like him decided now, that flight or departure could not be, without attracting attention and suspicion, and that she would let herself drift with the tide.

Alfred and Christine were a model pair of fiancés.

They were duly absorbed in each other ; he in being studied, listened to, and loved ; she in studying, listening, and loving.

Carlos inquired for Elma Dalziel.

"Oh, she is at Scarborough, surrounded by gallant cavaliers, I believe," said Mrs. Atherdale. "There are a couple of young officers who are smitten with her, I think ; one always hears of them dangling after her at least. She'll marry one of them. She's a nice girl, but a dreadful flirt."

"Yes, isn't she !" agreed Dora. "Why, down at Ilfracombe she carried off every man in the place. Nobody else had a chance. Even Alfred used to hang about after her until she picked up with a sort of wild Irish artist ; and then Alfred didn't relish rivalry !"

"My dear Dora, you should not chatter so thoughtlessly," said her mother, "nor talk of your brother's being 'after' Elma Dalziel. You would give any one the idea that he had been paying her serious attentions, which I am sure was far from being the case."

Carlos listened to this account of Elma with some vague feeling of dissatisfaction, which he would have been puzzled to account for or define. He did not consider himself the least in love with Elma ; and therefore it could not matter to him whether young officers and wild Irish artists "dangled after her" or not. Yet it vexed him to think of it. She seemed

suddenly removed to a great distance from him. Hitherto she had always seemed very near him, a bright memory, a pleasant hope. Now he felt as if she were far off from him, removed from his world, and utterly out of reach.





## CHAPTER IX.

### VANQUISHED.

I made another garden, yea,  
For my new love !  
I left the dead rose where it lay,  
And set the new above.

—*O'Shaughnessy.*

**T**HEY had a pleasant time in Paris. It was the first visit that either Dora or Christine had paid to the queen of cities, and they were both enchanted with everything, and knew not what they enjoyed most. They delighted in the little restaurant déjeuners and dinners, and the after-dinner ices at one of the round marble café tables in the Boulevards ; and all the modes and manners of English tourist life in Paris, so different to anything they had ever experienced before. While Mrs. Atherdale and Mrs. Cleve were walking and talking quietly, Christine and Dora would be lingering behind at the shop-windows, absorbed in contemplating the glories of the Palais Royal or the Rue de Rivoli. Diamond parures that would cost a year's income, fascinated

them one minute ; and the next, a tray of cheap brooches at three francs detained their admiring gaze, until the two elder ladies turned — impatiently, anxiously, or at last, as they grew accustomed to so turning, resignedly—to look after “ what had become of the girls.”

When the three gentlemen joined them, it naturally came to pass that Alfred walked off with Christine ; Carlos generally took charge of Dora ; and Geoffrey escorted Mrs. Atherdale ; whilst Ina Cleve was attached alternately, to one or other of the latter couples. Her inclination would have kept her always beside Geoffrey and Mrs. Atherdale ; but a sensitive feminine scrupulousness, and an idea of self-discipline, led her frequently to attend as a chaperone upon Carlos and Dora—a task about as grateful and gratifying as a chaperone’s office usually is ! The young people liked Mrs. Cleve, but they liked their own society quite as well without the addition of hers. Whenever Ina was with them she felt a “ third party ;” whenever she shared Geoffrey’s society with Mrs. Atherdale, she felt she had no right to be glad when he smiled, no right to be sad when he was gloomy, no right to let his looks and words sway her whole soul, as yet they did. Still in spite of her scorn of her own weakness, her severity upon her own folly, she rejoiced in his presence as the earth rejoices at the rising of the sun, when all its folded flowers burst into bloom. Her nature drank in the sunshine that was its proper

vivifier, and which had never till now bathed it in a light so strong and piercing. She could not help rejoicing, though she endeavoured only to regret.

When the party sat talking over their dessert and over their coffee and liqueurs, Ina Cleve often took little or no part in the conversation, but would sit peacefully content and observant, listening and studying the characteristics of the speakers, and of her hero especially.

As a rule, he judged of men and things mercifully and tolerantly, as one who being human and liable to err, was lenient to humanity's errors. He could, and often did, utter bitter and morbidly cynical reflections on the world in general, but very seldom pronounced harsh or bigoted decrees against any one individual or class. Human nature did not fare ill at his hands ; he looked on it with all its failings, and pitied it and forgave it.

Alfred Atherdale regarded it with the eye of an unfriendly critic, suspected it, prided himself on "seeing through" it, pulled it to pieces and dissected it, and descanted on its faults and failings. Now whereas Alfred criticised and depreciated "poor humanity," and Geoffrey more mercifully forgave it, Carlos and Christine *believed in* it. They sincerely and guilelessly put the best interpretation on everything, and were incapable of believing that anybody could be "bad all through." They arrived by instinct at the conclusion which some people gain on principle through argument ; that in the worst nature there lies some seed of good, which only needs the right ray of

sunshine to find it out, the right dew-drop to moisten it, to grow and spread wide branches and strike deep roots. Their charity was a broad and simple faith in humanity, a wide mild tolerance which was natural and unconscious, and never found utterance in theories laid down or homilies preached. As Carlos observed once, in defence of his sister's faculties of conversation,—

“It's so much easier to say a smart ill-natured thing than a smart good-natured one, that Christine has no chance!”

Which was quite true ; and was also as well for Christine's peace of mind, as Alfred liked to have the discussion all his own way, and would not have approved of counter-arguments from his betrothed. She suited him exactly ; because when she took a lenient view, and Alfred a severe one, of any given subject, she required just enough convincing to afford Alfred a little practice, and not enough to irritate his amour-propre. She could not argue, and seldom tried to answer ; only her puzzled blue eyes would plead against his decrees for a little while, a very little while, just until she was convinced, or rather, until she convinced herself, that he was quite right and she was silly and weak. Ina used to watch these little episodes and arguments, and draw her own deductions therefrom. And the comparisons she drew between the various members of the family somehow turned out to be all to the advantage of Geoffrey Atherdale.

All the virtues and attractions of his respective nephews and nieces were "So like him!" all their demerits and drawbacks were "How different!" Herself of a very pure and guileless and trusting nature, she made him her ideal Bayard, "Sans peur et sans reproche."

There were few places of interest in or near Paris which the Atherdales did not visit. They referred every day and every night to their guide-book, and went wherever the guide-book told them they ought to go. In the sculpture rooms and picture galleries of the Louvre, Ina Cleve would have liked to spend many hours, but she seldom had the hours to spare. They walked through half the Louvre one morning, and the other half the next afternoon, and then considered it "done." And every day there was an excursion.

One day of course they went to Versailles. They walked about the straight terraces of the stiffly laid out gardens, and on to the lovelier grounds of the Trianons, where the beauties of the Court of Louis XVI. had played at a simple and Arcadian life, surrounded by all the luxuries of the extravagant court, and where Marie Antoinette had frolicked in her toy farm while the great storm was gathering that was hereafter to sweep her away like a helpless broken queen-rose, once the pride of the garden, in the tumult of a raging flood, long pent, and loosed at last. In those wide-terraced gardens too, the first Napoleon had held his

imperial state, and now the star of the Second Empire was blazoned there.

Ina Cleve and Christine had sat down to rest on a rustic seat in the grounds. Mrs. Atherdale, Carlos, and Dora were walking on towards the Palace ; Alfred and Geoffrey were near Ina and Christine ; and Alfred, naturally claiming his fiancée's attention, led her to a "point of view," and showed her celebrated chimney-pots and other spots of interest through his opera-glass.

"You can stay and rest a little longer," said Geoffrey to Ina.

"We must not be late at the Palace. I don't want to hurry through, but to examine it well. Still, going all over a Palace is such a fatiguing business that I am glad of a little rest, and it's so lovely here."

"The Palace is mostly picture-galleries," observed Geoffrey, "and when you have seen one gallery you have seen all. They are all full of the Emperor on his white horse, or the Emperor in his little cocked hat among his marshals. You'll like that sort of thing, I suppose. Women always like battle-fields and warriors."

"I do not like battle-fields," she rejoined. "I do not care for warriors ; and that particular warrior, the first Emperor, is no hero of mine besides."

"Not? Why not? He was a hero."

"But not a favourite hero of mine."

"He was a glorious usurper. He knew how to

catch and hold the reins of the runaway horses of revolution, and rule them to his will, as none of the weak and bloated Bourbons could ever have done. Look at the faces of the legitimate kings! look at the face of the man who picked up the crown of France out of the mire, and wore it so royally! Which of those two types was born to rule?"

"I admit all you say," she answered. "He ruled that stormy age as a Bourbon could not have done; he was a ruler by birth and nature, I grant. But he had only the one idea—ambition! to that he sacrificed all else, for that he was selfish, sanguinary, and cruel. These are mere feminine scruples of sentiment, of course; and womanly feelings are nor the fit standard to measure a warrior by."

"I like to hear these womanly sentiments though," said Geoffrey, gently, with his kind earnest smile.

"I never can forgive his discardment of Josephine," continued Ina. "Yet for that a severer retribution overtook him than Josephine herself would have wished. After his marriage with Marie Louise, his star began to decline. Josephine forgave him, but Heaven did not."

"And now Josephine's grandson rules," said Geoffrey, "and the star of the Second Empire is in the ascendant."

"It is a strange romance," she observed. "The stories of real life are often stranger than fiction."

"Yes," assented Geoffrey broodingly, with thought-

ful eyes. "Stranger than fiction!" he repeated, drawing lines with his stick on the ground. Then he looked up at Ina, who was at her loveliest that day. A soft grey hat with a drooping grey feather shaded her dark hair. Grey and black, with a touch or two of white at the neck and wrists, composed her costume. This quiet and sombre dress detracted no more from her beauty than does the sombre midnight sky from the brightness of the moon. Her delicately and nobly moulded face shone the brighter from the shadow of its setting.

"There are strange true-life stories, true *love-stories*," observed Geoffrey, with his eyes fixed upon hers. Under the magnetic influence of his look, the colour rose slowly, softly in her cheeks. The consciousness of blushing, and the knowledge of his intent gaze, deepened the colour to crimson; she turned her head away confused, vexed, and ashamed.

"Why do you blush when I look at you?" asked Geoffrey, drawing nearer. Something in his voice made her heart flutter strangely. She had never, as a child or as a girl of seventeen, blushed more vividly and deeply than she was colouring now. But at his question she tried to raise her head and look at him calmly.

"I am not blushing," she said, with a very poor attempt at pride and reserve.

"Not blushing?" he said, and smiled the rare sweet smile that lit up his stern sad face with a

singular tenderness and beauty of expression. "What were we talking about?" he went on, with less calmness than usual in his tone. "True life-stories—true love-stories? Say, Ina! will you tell me how many times a man can love in his life? I love *you* now, Ina, and I shall never love again!"

He had said it; it was not to be recalled. It was the truth, and he had no wish to recall it. For that hour, he forgot all in the world beside his love for her; for that one hour at least, in learning that she loved him, in yielding utterance to his own long silent love, he knew what happiness was.

And that hour opened to her a new world, unveiled to her the brightness of a prospect she had never before beheld. She stood at last upon the summit of "the Mountains of Delight," on a height she had never hitherto attained. And from this new eminence how far below, how pallid and colourless, looked all her past! For in that gentle placid peaceful past, there lay none of the bitter white ashes of the fierce fire of love. That fire had never lit her life till now.

At last she felt that her beauty was no longer blooming to waste; the full glory of youth, romance, and love burst upon her and flooded her soul with its splendour, now, when the early morning of life was past, and she had thought it was too late.

"Why do you love me, Ina?" he said, as they walked together away from the Palace of Versailles, later that day—that day which seemed to them both

brief as a moment, yet full as a lifetime. He looked in her face searchingly and seriously as he put the question.

"I do not know—I could not help it. You have made me love you."

"No, that is not so," he replied. "It is not *my* doing. Don't think that. I could not have made you love me if the Fates had not ordained it. Don't you know, can't you see, that nothing I could do or say would have caused you to love me, if it had not been decreed you should?"

"According to fatalistic doctrines—no, of course not. But then, if you accept fatalism, what becomes of our free-will? of the efficacy of our own efforts—our own prayers—our own resolves?"

"Nothing comes of them," he said. "We have no free-will. If we had, should I——" He broke off, and then added, "If we had our free-will, the universe would be in our hands. We should be masters, and not as we are—slaves."

"Then if our lives be all cut out for us from beginning to end, without the power to alter them," she rejoined, "let us not blame, but pity all great sinners and criminals of the deepest dye!"

"Well, don't you pity them, Ina?" he asked. "The more sins a man has on his conscience and eating away his life, the more he needs our pity."



## CHAPTER X.

“ONLY LOVE ME !”

Oft first love must perish  
Like the poor snow-drop, boyish love of Spring,  
Born pale to die and strew the path of triumph,  
Before the imperial glowing of the rose,  
Whose passion conquers all !

—*Beddoes.*

**W**HEN the new position of affairs was exhibited to the eyes of the Atherdales, every one duly poured out good wishes and congratulations and expressed proper pleasure, although, perhaps, neither Mrs. Atherdale nor her son were quite delighted. They professed not to be in the least surprised, and really persuaded themselves into believing that they had “seen it all along.” Alfred discovered that he had been daily expecting the disclosure, but had deemed it only discreet to keep his intuition to himself. He would, of course, have preferred in his secret heart that his uncle should not marry. So would Mrs. Atherdale. Still it could not be expected that he was to remain single for their sakes. And, if he must marry, Mrs. Atherdale was

glad that his choice had fallen upon Ina Cleve, whom she regarded with a sincere friendship. Carlos was genuinely pleased, and Christine and Dora romantically interested.

"Will he take her to America? or will they go and live at Saxby Towers, do you think?" inquired Dora of Carlos.

"I don't know. Uncle Geoff never says what he is going to do. But now he will do whatever she wishes, I suppose. That's in the natural order of things."

"If *I* were she, I should like to go and live at the Towers and be the grand lady!"

"And if *I* were a woman, and had never been far away, I'd travel about as far and as fast as possible! And Uncle Geoff's a good traveller—it's nice to go with him."

"Yes, I dare say. I should not mind travelling about with Uncle and *you*," said Dora. "I should not be a bit afraid of you, Carlos; and you would do things to please me, and go the way I wanted, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," replied Carlos, in matter-of-fact assent. "And so would Uncle Geoff to please Mrs. Cleve, I am sure." He had uttered this remark purely through a loyal assertion of his uncle's goodnature, which it seemed to him Dora was inclined to doubt. Perhaps he would not have become aware that it contained an inference of a resemblance in the two relationships,

had not Dora rejoined with a slight blush and a sort of coquettish primness in her manner, "The cases are widely different."

"I didn't mean to imply they were similar," he said; the idea of the possible similarity of the cases now flashing for the very first time across his mind. "But you musn't think, because a fellow's a cousin, that he wouldn't do anything to please you, or be right willing to take any trouble in the world for you. You know I would, Dora; don't you?"

"Yes, you dear boy, I think you would!" she replied, with a coaxing confidence.

Carlos and Dora had both changed a little, he growing less boyish and she less childlike, during the year they had been apart. Good friends and affectionate cousins they had always been, and their friendship was now gradually and almost imperceptibly assuming a tone of specialty and confidence, even a shade of youthful romance. They were also thrown rather more together than they had previously been, owing to the natural mutual absorption of Geoffrey and Ina Cleve, and of Alfred and Christine, who pairing off as they did, threw Carlos and Dora more and more upon each other's society.

When they returned to London, Christine stayed at Inkermann Villa with her aunt and cousins; Geoffrey and Carlos took rooms together, but were both of course as constantly as ever at the villa, which seemed their natural home.

The children manifested a deep interest in the matrimonial prospects of their beloved Uncle and equally beloved governess. Their first anxiety was lest Uncle Geoffrey should go back to America and take Mrs. Cleve with him ; but their minds were set at peace by an assurance that no such attempt was contemplated, at least for the present. They listened intently to every word everybody said about the engagement, and stored up in their memories all they heard. Letty propounded the question one day to Ina :

“What is a Fool’s Paradise?”

“A heaven, dear, that only fools can enter. Wise people stand in the cold outside. And if any fools wandering about those beautiful gardens come to their senses and learn wisdom, all the Paradise vanishes like a desert mirage.”

“You didn’t think Uncle Geoffrey would make a fool of himself at his age, Letty, did you?” observed that gentleman. “But do you know, little one, he finds the Fool’s Paradise such pleasant walking that he doesn’t regret his vanished wisdom?”

Letty also confided to Ina, in private and under many seals of secrecy, the opinions held upon the subject of her intended marriage in the lower regions of the household.

“Sarah says that of course ‘there’s no accounting for tastes.’”

“But she *does* wonder at Mr. Atherdale’s taste!”

interposed Ina, laughing, with a mild imitation of Sarah's manner.

"No, it's *yours* she wonders at!" said Letty, exploding with suppressed mirth. "She says Mr. Geoffrey is so old! and so full of odd ways, and having lived all his life in them foreign parts, she should never feel sure what games he mightn't be up to. I believe Sarah thinks he's got two or three black wives already. Isn't it funny? Only fancy my having two or three black aunts!"

Ina joined in the child's laughter gleefully; she was so completely happy that she laughed at the mildest hint of a joke—even at Carlos's humour, which was not generally remarkable for brilliance or originality.

It seemed strange to her now to recollect, as she sometimes did, her engagement before her first marriage. She had been a delicate, docile, yielding, girl of barely seventeen then, who had blushed and drooped her head, and been given, rather than given herself, away in marriage. How unreal and like a dream that time seemed now! how calm and colourless her feelings had been! how shallow the shy tremulous flutters and blushes with which she had listened to the first words of love that ever reached her ear! Yet she had thought *then* that she felt deeply. She had thought the tears she shed—when after a few months' married life, her kind, common-place, practical-natured husband died—were the bitterest tears that could ever flow from her eyes. And now she looked back upon

her old self with a kind of tender wonder, and asked herself sometimes whether, if she lived a hundred years, *this* present, being the past, could ever fade as *that* had done? and leave but as pale and dim a shadow in her memory?

"I think my heart is an October rose," she said one day to Geoffrey when he brought her one of the very "last roses of summer." "In my May and June it never bloomed into the fulness of hope and joy that it knows now."

"An October rose," repeated Geoffrey smiling. "Why, look, Ina, look in the glass? is this face autumnal? You are in your full June now; or if not—why, I never saw a Michaelmas so like Midsummer! I wish you would contrive to look a little more autumnal, so as to make a more suitable match for me! Do you know, Ina, I found a whole harvest of grey hairs in my beard yesterday? I thought you ought to know it, because, though it isn't ground for a divorce yet, even in the enlightened country I come from, it might be deemed a good and sufficing cause for breaking an engagement."

It had been arranged that as there was no reason for any delay of Geoffrey Atherdale's marriage with Ina Cleve, it should take place in the beginning of November, as for both their sakes the sooner he ceased to be a lonely wanderer, and she left the place where she had lived as governess, the better.

"Three weeks—in three weeks, Ina!" Geoffrey

said one day, when only that short period of their separate life remained. "Then I shall be no more lonely. Yet I did not mind my loneliness—I was accustomed to it. I never wanted to change it till I knew you. Shall I ever be worse than lonely, I wonder?"

"Geoffrey? Worse than lonely?" she repeated questioningly, looking in his face, wondering, puzzled, seeking to read his meaning, but neither angry nor suspicious. He loved her too intensely for her ever to doubt his love; and even as he spoke, his arm was folding her fondly to his side. Her dark lovely eyes searched his curiously and a little wistfully. Why should he think of being "worse than lonely," when she was soon to be his wife?

"What did you mean?" she whispered.

"Mean! Nothing, my darling. Who could be lonely—to say nothing of worse—with your love! Only love me, Ina, and I shall never be lonely again. Why, if you were not to be mine, I should not be staying here now! If I had not won you I should have gone to join the war in my adopted country. I should have been fighting in the ranks of the South."

"Oh, Geoffrey, would you really fight for slavery?"

"Not for slavery. For freedom! I should fight with that gallant army—the flower and chivalry of America—for the freedom of the South! My best friends are fighting there, and glorious fellows they are."

"They might be that, you know, and yet using their courage and their chivalry on the wrong side," suggested Ina gently.

"Is there ever a thoroughly right or a thoroughly wrong side?" questioned Geoffrey philosophically. "This war, like most other wars, is a struggle for the uppermost. And do you know, Ina, how and when the seed was sown that is bearing such bitter fruit; fruit red with the life-blood of our best and bravest?"

"I should think the evil seed was sown," she said, "on the day the first cargo of slaves was landed on American shores; and so, from such a seed of tyranny and wrong, can we wonder at this fruit?"

"I have another theory on the point," he rejoined. "I leave the question of slavery alone. I am not prepared to defend it. But the feeling that has found its vent in this war has been germinating since the colonists of the seventeenth century went out. Those who settled in Virginia were Royalists in sympathy; while it was the Puritans who peopled New England. The souls of the Cavaliers are living again in the untitled aristocracy of the South; the spirit of the Commonwealth survives in the North."

"Do you think so?" she said, taking in the theory with great interest, and pondering it over with a thoughtful look. "Is it not strange then to reflect that according to your theory the Royalists of the seventeenth century are the rebels of to-day?"

"The same spirit animates them ; there is a resemblance even in the general type of character," he observed. "The cause is different of course, because times and things have changed. There is devotion to a cause and devotion to a chief. Men fight equally for either. What was loyalty to the King in the brave old Cavaliers is loyalty to the cause of the South to-day in their grandchildren's children. You understand, Ina, it's the cause of the liberty of each individual State, and *not* the cause of slavery, that I advocate. In this fierce wrestle for the mastery, it is my earnest desire that the South should get the uppermost, because the victory of the South will mean its freedom ; while the victory of the North, though it will be the emancipation of the negro slaves, will mean the oppression of the Southern gentlemen."

"So that on one side, the slaves will rejoice and the masters suffer, and on the other, the slaves will suffer and the masters will rejoice."

"Just so, it is the way of warfare. Like a see-saw, one end can only be raised triumphantly by the other end being down in the dust. It is just possible that the South may be humbled to the dust yet ; but it will not be without a splendid struggle. And though New Orleans is taken, while Vicksburg holds out, and Richmond is invulnerable, there is every hope for our cause. The spirit of the South is of the stuff that breaks but won't bend. I acknowledge, too, of course freely, the magnificent energy, ability, and courage,

and resolution that are on the side of the Union. In fact, to say they are Americans who fight, is to say they are energetic and brave."

"I would forgive a great deal to either a man or a cause possessing those qualities," observed Ina.

"Of course you would," he said. "Was there ever a woman that wouldn't? It is one of the most unfailing feminine qualities — this worship of personal bravery; you find it in all the sex, of every class and temperament and age."

"And I am afraid I cannot boast of being an exception to the rule."

"Women over-rate physical courage," he continued. "A man is so despicable without it, that he is not worth admiring for possessing it."

"It is not only *physical* courage that we admire," responded Ina, "but every quality that means *strength*, whether moral or physical. Truth, honour, courage, and fortitude mean strength; they all spring from some phase of strength of body or of mind. The courage to face and resist a temptation, or to acknowledge a sin committed, are either of them as great or greater than the courage that only dares a personal danger."

"The courage to acknowledge a sin committed," repeated Geoffrey. "You would admire that courage, Ina?"

"Yes."

"And despise the man who did not possess it?"

"I should have no right to despise any man for want of that which I may equally want myself."

"You could not want the courage to confess a sin, for you would never commit one!" said Geoffrey, not complimentarily or smilingly however, but with a curious gloom of manner, and with the well-known cloud upon his brow. This cloud was so marked that Ina could not fail to notice it. She was getting accustomed to her strange lover's moody fitful ways; but she was not yet so accustomed as to think nothing of them; she still wondered, watched, and conjectured the cause of every cloud of care that crossed his face. She slipped her fingers through his arm, and clasping both hands gently there, gazed at him earnestly. He was silent and kept his face slightly averted from her for some minutes; then he turned to her; his deep grey eyes looked into hers with the hopeless shadow of despairing gloom they wore sometimes.

"You are very pure and good," he said. "I wonder you ever loved *me*!"

"Geoffrey—my dearest, bravest, truest! why should I not love you?" she answered tenderly, drawing closer to him, with a caressing faith and confidence.

His stern sad face softened gradually as he looked at her; his gloom began to melt a little under the magic of her loving eyes, the caress of her gentle hands.

"Why not? why not?" he repeated. "Oh, for no reason—no reason, my Ina, except that you are better

than I am ! Kiss me, dear, and tell me again that you love me ! So ! Yes, I believe it. And you must go on loving me. Nothing shall come between us ; nothing shall take you away from me. Heaven ! if I should ever see you shrink from me ! if you should ever turn against me ! If I should lose you living, it would be worse than losing you dead. Far worse ! If you were dead, I might die to follow you. But if I lost you living, I could never reach you again—not in this world nor any other. So you must be true to me, and trust me, Ina ; and, so help me God ! nothing shall ever shake your faith.”





## CHAPTER XI.

### FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

Dream-like glow of a rapt noon hour,  
Rose-tinted rapture that may not last,  
Heaven seen clear between shower and shower,  
Dawn colour ruined by day's overcast !  
—*O'Shaughnessy.*

**O**NE day Ina Cleve received a letter from her sister Elma, to the effect that one of those two young officers, who had previously been heard of as “dangling round her,” had come to the point of a declaration of his attachment, which she had thought on the whole she might as well accept, as although he had only his pay, he had “expectations.” The young lady wrote of the affair in a very cool and matter-of-fact way, and further observed that the news was private, but might be confided with due caution to the Atherdales. Of this permission Ina, being woman, of course availed herself without delay. The ladies of the family were all as much interested as their own affairs would allow them to be ; the gentlemen uttered no comments and asked no questions.

Geoffrey however appeared gratified, and even a little relieved, as if a fear or a responsibility was removed from him. His nephews did not partake of his gratification. The feeling which humanity shares with the proverbial dog-in-the-manger seldom allows a man or a woman to utter perfectly sincere congratulations on the marriage of any person of the opposite sex who has been especially charming to them, and to whom they think they have not been unattractive. Neither Alfred nor Carlos was quite genuine in the commonplace and indifferent expression of pleasure they both uttered. Alfred had undeniably flirted with Elma in Devonshire, though whether he had ever entertained an idea of marrying her, no one but himself knew. A man who has flirted with a pretty girl, with or without serious intentions, is seldom glad to see her marry another. Carlos's attention to Elma had been too downright and free from any specialty or **reserve**, too much an honest boyish admiration to be **defined** as flirtation. Nevertheless a young man's first **romance**—even if it be not deeply rooted enough to become love, and even when time and absence have weakened and dimmed it—causes him an unpleasant reminder of its existence when he first hears that its object is engaged or married. Carlos felt this twinge of recollection and regret, but it was only a passing twinge. He had been too long apart from Elma, too long accustomed to her absence, and had known her but too slightly, to feel any sharp pain. And then he

and Dora had been drawn by the force of circumstances, and by their own impressionable natures, nearer and nearer together; and while both were conscious of this drawing together, neither of them knew how much it was due to their age and circumstances.

The Atherdales were pursuing their usual domestic morning occupations. Mrs. Atherdale, Ina and Dora, were sitting, each with some different sort of needlework in the dining-room. Christine was in the library copying some manuscript for Alfred; the children were practising duets in the drawing-room. All were busy and happy, and the three ladies together were discussing the approaching wedding of Geoffrey and Ina, when two familiar heads passed by the laurel-bushes that fringed the window, and as Geoffrey and Carlos entered, needlework was pushed aside, and the usual warm and affectionate welcome greeted them.

"Well, what news? Is the American mail in? have you got your letters yet?" asked Mrs. Atherdale, as they all gathered round the fire that warmed up the damp autumn morning.

"Yes, more letters than we bargained for. I hate business," replied Geoffrey, "and they are bothering me about a bit of business that does not please me. Carlos here has got a bit of business that ought to please *him*, by this morning's mail."

"What is it, Carlos?" inquired Dora eagerly turning to her cousin.

"I'm not glad the poor old fellow's dead," he replied irrelevantly. "I'd never seen him since I was nine years old, but he was a first-rate fellow I have always heard. And I am all the more convinced of it now that he has remembered me."

"Who in the world is *he*, my dear incomprehensible boy?" inquired his aunt, naturally puzzled.

"A relation of my mother—Lewis Macarthy," he answered. "He's dead and has left me four thousand dollars. He made a pot of money in the gold mines; he has left half to his sister, and the rest to be divided amongst a host of relations, and I've come in for my share."

"How nice! We wish you joy! We are very glad," the ladies all exclaimed simultaneously.

"But what is the business that does not please *you*, Geoffrey," asked Ina, mindful of his first words.

"Being the least pleasant, it will keep the best," he replied. "But there's nothing wrong—nothing to cause you a bit of anxiety. That boy's in luck, isn't he? We came in for lawyers' letters last night, both of us."

Mrs. Atherdale was curious as to what Geoffrey's piece of business might be; and, thinking that he would be more likely to confide it to Ina if they were alone, she contrived to inveigle them into the drawing-room, to send the children away, their practising hour being over, and to leave the lovers there.

Then, as she had foreseen, Geoffrey soon informed

Ina of the nature of the business. It was simply that the tenant in possession of Saxby Towers was about to give that establishment up suddenly, and Geoffrey's lawyer wished to know whether Mr. Atherdale, having returned to England, contemplated residing there himself, or was desirous of finding another tenant ; he also mentioned that certain repairs were necessary, and that some damage had been done to the stable-wall for which the present tenants were liable, but the claim for which they seemed inclined to resist.

"The stable-wall?" repeated Ina. "But that does not annoy you, does it, Geoffrey? it is not worth while vexing yourself about that."

"Not exactly," he said. "Did you think it was the stable-wall that could vex me, Ina? No ; it is the mention of the place—the question if I wish to reside there. What do *you* say?"

"Whatever you wish, Geoffrey," she answered ; but something of wistfulness and inquiry in her look led him to fancy she was not indifferent in the matter.

"But you have a wish of your own," he said. "Tell me, Ina ; I have a right to know all your thoughts," he added tenderly and gravely. Ina's real thought was, "How he must have loved Viola, since for her sake he still shrinks from the place that was his home ! Does he love *me* half as well?" But she did not speak her thought ; she only clung to him and looked at him seekingly, pleadingly, earnestly. He read the entreaty

of the look, and attributed it to a wish to live at Saxby Towers.

"You would like to go there, darling?" he said.

"Geoffrey, if you love me, could you not be happy there with me?" she whispered.

"Could I?" he said. "I might try. Take you there with me, live there with you! Well, if you really love me, why not? It would be a bold experiment. Shall we try it, Ina? Yes, or no?"

She hesitated a moment. "Put his love for you to the proof! Try if for your sake he will brave the stab of those sad memories! Try if your love cannot comfort and compensate him for all," said her eager fond womanly heart. "Surely it is best that you and he should live in the home of the fathers, on the estate that is his," added Reason. "Take care! be warned!" said the still small voice of a subtle vague instinct. But the voice of her longing jealous heart spoke loudest.

"Shall we try it, Ina? Yes or no?"

"Yes," she said. "Geoffrey, to please me!"

Meanwhile Mrs. Atherdale, on household matters intent, was looking over the younger children's wardrobe with them, while Carlos and Dora were left alone.

"Well, how go all the wedding preparations?" he inquired.

"Oh, beautifully!" Dora replied. "Only is n't it a pity it's to be so quiet? Widows can't have bridesmaids of course. If I were to be a bride, I would

have twelve bridesmaids and a white satin dress, made quite simply, with a very long train, and a diamond brooch."

"It's a pretty sight a wedding ; but if I were the bridegroom I'd like to be hidden away in a corner, or up in the gallery, out of the way of all the staring eyes."

"Oh, nobody looks at the bridegroom," said Dora consolingly, "it's the bride who is the centre of attraction. Come and sit down, Carlos, and hold this skein of wool for me to wind."

Carlos took a chair within about two inches of Dora's, and undertook the task of skeinholding on his unaccustomed hands. It has been a dangerous task since the days of Priscilla.

"We are left all to ourselves, to entertain each other, owing to the separate seclusions of those two pairs of lovers," observed Dora.

"I'm very grateful to them, I'm sure. More than that, Dora, I think I envy them."

"I can't see why you should envy them. You couldn't be engaged to your own sister, and you don't want to be engaged to Mrs. Cleve, surely?"

"No, they wouldn't be the right ones for me ; but they are the right ones for their happy owners."

"You would be very hard to please, Carlos, I think."

"Should I, Dora?" he said, drawing an inch nearer, and looking on her pretty face admiringly.

Dora blushed, and bent lower over her skein of wool.

"How pretty you look to-day!" said Carlos sincerely. It was not the first broad compliment he had paid her; indeed his compliments were always broad; and she was no whit displeased, and only lightly embarrassed.

"Do I, Carlos? I am glad you think so," she said sweetly.

"You would be just as glad if any other fellow thought so."

"Of course I should!" said Dora, tossing her curls coquettishly; and then added more softly, "Should I, Carlos?"

"Are you glad I've got this little windfall of a legacy?" he asked, with apparent irrelevance, as an attractive idea began to take shape in his mind. "It might make things different some ways, mightn't it? Are you glad, Dora?"

"Of course I am," she said, winding busily at the wool, but winding rather at random, for the ball dropped from her hand.

They both stooped simultaneously to pick it up; Carlos's fair hair brushed Dora's dark curls, as their hands met upon the ball of scarlet wool. A little electric thrill flashed from one to the other. Forgetful of the skeins he tangled by his movement, he took both her hands in one of his, and his other arm found itself naturally round her waist.

"There are two pairs of lovers—two matches made up in this house already!" he said. "Say, Dora, shall we make up the third?"

"Oh, Carlos," she answered, crimson with blushes but smiling nevertheless, "wouldn't three sets of lovers in one house be too many?"

"Not a bit, the more the merrier. Is it *yes*, Dora darling?"

"But, Carlos—I never thought——"

"But *I* have thought," he said; although in truth he had not thought very much nor considered very long; an impulse with him was quick to become a resolve; and he, both then and thereafter, showed a hazardous inclination for leaping in the dark. "I have thought, Dora, and I want you to think—that we should get on very well together—always. Say, my pretty Dora, is it yes or no?"

"I think, Carlos—I *think* it is *yes*!"

Dora, making this admission, hid her blushing face on Carlos's shoulder. Carlos naturally lifted the pretty head from its resting-place, and sealed their betrothal with a kiss, and fancied as he thus pledged himself to her, that he loved her very dearly. So perhaps he did, in a way; but it was not the way in which men love when they come to recognise the other "half of their perfect heart," and which Carlos had yet to learn.

Now in the Atherdale family the general objection to cousins marrying did not prevail. There had been

cousinly marriages more than once before amongst the various branches of that family, and it was now certain that there would be again. The engagement between Alfred and Christine having been sanctioned, there was really no valid objection to the betrothal of Carlos and Dora. Neither Mrs. Atherdale nor Geoffrey offered any opposition to it; indeed it might safely be said that both were rather gratified than otherwise; and no one out of the family was consulted on the subject; as the Atherdales generally managed their own affairs, whether well or ill, for themselves and independently. Carlos had "not bad prospects in life, and now would have a nice little nest-egg to start with" —so Mrs. Atherdale reflected; besides, he was a dear boy, and his uncle was very fond of him, and so indeed they were all; and all things considered, dear Dora might go further and fare worse.

Alfred considered that both Carlos and Dora were rather too young. "They are younger than their years," he said with a gentle compassionate sort of tolerance. Still he waived this objection, and graciously gave them his good wishes and his approbation. To Christine he occasionally expressed his sentiments on the subject of the congeniality of character between the other two young lovers.

"Carlos and Dora appear very well suited to each other," he observed. "They are both alike young and immature, fond of frivolous amusements, absorbed in the present; and heedless alike of the future and

the past ; both without any aims or inspirations, without any longing to cultivate the talents and develop the intellect which—in a greater or less degree—we all possess. Thus they appear well-suited to each other. But is it not only in *appearance*? Would not each of them be better if coupled with a nature calculated to elevate and cultivate it? rather than with one as thoughtless and light as itself. They will bury such talents as they possess ; they will let their minds lie fallow and their intellects run to ruin ; and in fact I fear that they will devote their lives only to frivolous amusements ! For *us*, my dearest, we will aspire to develop to the highest degree all gifts that God has given us. Our lives, Christine, shall be dedicated to the improvement of humanity and the cultivation of our own natures."

"You see Carlos is younger than you, and he has not had your advantages of education. He will come to seek more in life than amusement some day ; he will get more like *you* as time goes on !" said Christine ; in whose heart faith in her brother and reliance on her lover grew together entwined, equally deep-rooted, and equally sincere.

It must be acknowledged that there was very little intellect exercised in the love-making of Carlos and Dora Atherdale. They resorted to anything worthy of the name of "conversation" but seldom, and to discussion on any topic of political, literary, or intellectual interest, never ! A little "chaff," a little com-

pliment; a little coquetry, the whole well sweetened with kisses, composed their usual entertainment; a little laying of plans as to where they would travel, and what furniture they would have when they were married, varied it now and then. Intellectual dissertations or original theories were certainly never to be expected from Carlos, even under the influence of love; and Dora had no desire that his affection should manifest itself in "sermons," as she would have denominated those orations of Alfred's to which Christine listened so devotedly. Alfred's observations about Carlos and Dora were true; intellect was and would be wanting in their union; but there was more than intellect wanting, something more than any quality of imagination or perception was missing in their love. The truth was, that it lacked the element of exaltation, and aspiration—of heart, not of brain—which marks the love of all deep natures stirred to their depths. I doubt if Carlos ever thought, "I will lead the better and nobler life through loving her!" I doubt if Dora ever prayed, "Heaven help me to be worthy of his love!"

When Ina and Christine spoke of their mutual position and prospects, and the woman and the girl joined hands sympathetically, each in her pure Madonna heart praying to be "better and worthier for *his* sake!" and each knowing that the other felt as she did, Dora's pretty, happy smile spoke only of gratified vanity and playful coquetry. While Geoffrey looked

through his bride's beautiful eyes, and loved the lovelier soul beneath that lent those sweet eyes, which were its clear true mirrors, their greatest charm, and lit them with its own serene light, Carlos looked only at his fiancée's pretty face.

They were very fond of each other, no doubt, and admired each other's superficial attractions sincerely, and were justly proud of each other. And they made a "lovely couple!" as matchmakers would say. He was a head taller than she; he was stalwart and strong, and she was *petite* and graceful; he was fair and she was dark; and thus they were perfectly suited personally. And when Dora's head drooped on Carlos's shoulder, and Dora's little plump fingers lost themselves in Carlos's big, broad hand, and the blonde and brunette curls rested softly together, it made a very pretty *tableau vivant*, as Dora sometimes thought when stealing a glance over his shoulder at the mirror.

Carlos had always spent about half his time at Inkermann Villa, and under these new and enjoyable circumstances it naturally came to pass that he now spent more hours there than ever. He came and went as though it were indeed his home; and Mrs. Atherdale thought the dear boy would make a very domestic, home-loving husband when the time came. But Ina Cleve observed one day to Geoffrey:

"To see Carlos lounging by the fire, and playing with that sleepy old tabby-cat, somehow now and then

suggests to me the idea that a young tiger-cub might stretch itself just as smoothly before the fire, and purr and lap cream from a saucer, and rub its head against our fingers—for a season !”

“Why, I only half understand you, Ina,” replied Geoffrey, a little puzzled ; “do you mean to liken the boy to a tiger ?”

“It was a stupid simile,” she said, “I do not mean of course that there is anything savage or harmful in Carlos ; he has one of the best and tenderest hearts in the world, I think, but there does always seem to me something *untamed* about him. I always fancy there is a wild element in his nature that makes it seem sometimes strange to me to see him purring before the fire as tamely as domestic tabby herself. Perhaps it is a silly fancy of mine. A wild nature may be tamed by a girl's hand.”

“And as you have tamed the old tiger, why should not little Dora tame the cub ?” said Geoffrey.

“Ah, my tiger did not need much taming,” she responded caressingly. “Years and thought and time have done the taming for *you* ! there was not much of a hard task left for me.”

“You think not, sweet and trustful ! but you don't know, when the old tiger came tamely to your hand, what bones he had been crunching in his den for years and years. He came to your hand tame enough—but your hand was the first ! Ah, Ina, are you never afraid he may bite yet ?”

Geoffrey had smiled as he spoke, and Ina smiled as she answered :

“No, I’m not afraid to trust myself in his den. He’ll never even growl at *me*, I think.”

Thus the three courses of love ran smoothly, and fretted upon no rock, and were ruffled by no breezes. The three engagements in one family formed of course a fruitful topic of conversation amongst all the family’s friends. “It was quite charming to see !” most people agreed ; but some commented upon the cousinly relationship between the two younger pairs as a drawback and a pity, and observed moreover, that Carlos and Dora were too young to know their own minds. However these young people neither knew nor cared what their friends said ; and it duly came to pass that on the wedding-day of Geoffrey Atherdale and Ina Cleve, two happy couples of affianced lovers followed the bridal pair to the altar.

Neither of these young couples were however to follow the example set them that day until the following summer. Alfred and Christine hoped then to begin life on their own account ; and as Carlos would then have come of age, and Dora be turned eighteen, it had been arranged that there should be a grand double wedding.

The wedding of Geoffrey and Ina was a quiet one, the bridal party comprising only the family and a few friends. Elma Dalziel was not there. She was detained in the country by a slight illness, and Ina

had fancied too from her sister's letter that she was somehow troubled in mind. Although no near relatives of the bride were present, there was nothing missing nor found wanting. Ina was too absorbed in her love for Geoffrey to seriously miss even her little sister.

Brides are always expected to look lovely, and Ina more than fulfilled all such expectations. During her engagement to Geoffrey, she had seemed to grow younger and fairer day by day. On that morning, dressed in delicate grey, her cheeks suffused with a soft rose-leaf blush, her dark eyes dewy and bright, she was as lovely as a dream, and about her whole beauty hung an ethereal halo of dream-like spirituality. "She is like a Madonna! she has the face of an angel!" the spectators whispered to each other.

"I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony ye do now confess it."

The clergyman made the usual moment's pause. The bride was looking upwards, peacefully, trustfully, with a tender solemn absorption and exaltation on her face. The bridegroom was looking at her with a sort of stern painful intentness. But no one broke the silence. After the ordinary brief pause, the service was resumed and continued as usual.

Ina uttered the responses gently and tremulously ;

Geoffrey spoke in low deep tones. So the two were joined together by the grand and beautiful old solemn words, which no loving woman's heart has heard unmoved since the ritual was ordained.

Christine's blue eyes were full of tears as she looked at Alfred, and mentally took the solemn vows she heard to him. Dora listened earnestly, with more thought and womanliness than usual on her brow.

After the ceremony, Geoffrey and his bride started for a honeymoon tour along the coast of Normandy without waiting to partake of the breakfast. Whether it were custom or no custom, Geoffrey did not care ; whether it was expected or not expected of him he was equally indifferent. He took his bride away quietly and unostentatiously without going through the ceremony of public farewells, without the usual parting confusion of embraces and handshakings and good wishes, with only one single slipper thrown after them by a sympathetic housemaid. He also utterly declined the proper pair of grey horses, and went off in a brougham drawn by one sober brown.

Although there was no general leave-taking, Mrs. Atherdale slipped away from the guests unobserved to bid them good-bye, and Christine, unbidden, stole after her.

"You are my aunt now ! Dear Aunt Ina, good-bye !" whispered Christine, embracing her uncle's wife lovingly, while Mrs. Atherdale parted from Geoffrey with sisterly kisses and good wishes.

Then Geoffrey extended his hand to his bride to lead her to the carriage.

"Come, Ina," he said, with a fond frank tenderness, his dreamy eyes brightening, and a proud and glad proprietorship in his voice and gesture. "Good-bye !" he added, with a smile to his sister-in-law and niece, turning on the threshold to look back at them.

They never remembered to have seen Geoffrey's face so peaceful and hopeful, so free from care and full of content, as in that parting look.





## CHAPTER XII.

### SAXBY TOWERS.

When song is glad, and when life is young,  
And hearts are light and true,  
In winter e'en the hills are green,  
And snowy skies are blue !

Oh, heart so heavy, so full of tears !  
Ah, voice so sad and low !  
How sing'st thou *here*, but of dying years,  
And summers of long ago !

—*Francillon.*

**T**HE month of November ran smoothly on its course. The four happy lovers at Inker-mann Villa proved in practice, what they had not hitherto unanimously held in theory ; that this usually dreariest and weariest month of all the year can bear itself as brightly and gaily as sunny Mid-summer or merry Christmas. They had not come yet to the time which we all of us arrive at sooner or later, of realising the melancholy of that season which seems to too many of us to be called in very satire, "Merry Christmas : " and when they observed to each other contentedly that each of those cold

November evenings, as they gathered round the fire and drew the curtains close, was "like a Christmas Eve," they really meant it as a compliment to November.

They heard of course often from Geoffrey and Ina, who seemed to be enjoying a happy honeymoon in Normandy, and who presently wrote from Havre to announce that they were on their homeward way, that they should merely pass through London on their way to Saxby Towers, and that they would be at the station at a given day and hour to catch the train for Burlford, the nearest station to Saxby. At the London station they pressingly invited all the Atherdales family to meet them and accompany them to the Towers. Not one was to be left behind ; there was more than room enough for all ; and Geoffrey wished them all to enter the old home with him after his long absence. The Atherdales also learnt with some little surprise, and most of them with pleasure, that Elma Dalziel was with her sister and brother-in-law, and was of course to be one of the Towers party.

Geoffrey's proposed arrangement was accepted and agreed to almost as a matter of course ; and one morning in the earliest days of December, two cabs were drawn up at the gate of Inkermann Villa, two cabmen tramped up and down the garden-path with boxes and portmanteaus, and a general bustle and Babel pervaded the passages and staircases as all the party rushed about, putting last touches to toilettes, and

travelling-bags, and calling wildly for forgotten things imperatively needed at the last moment.

Christine was there of course, handy and helpful, running about to fetch everything, and helping everybody. Carlos was volunteering to help carry the boxes, and his offers of service being rather snubbed as *infra dig*, was wandering about whistling with his hands in his pockets, enjoying the fun and chaffing his little cousins.

He for one did not know how long he was going to be away, and did not much care. He might stay at Saxby a week or two, or a month or two, as long as Dora stayed—it did not much matter anyhow; and then they would be back again all together at the familiar fireside of Inkermann Villa.

So he lounged out of the well-known and well-beloved home without a glance back or a thought of a good-bye to it. He did certainly bestow a farewell on the cat, who had come with arched back and erect tail to see the party off, and whom he took up by the fore-paws to evoke a friendly parting “mi-au.” For Carlos and the whiskered tabby had been great friends, and it was amusing sometimes to see the big broad-shouldered young fellow with Puss, purring, curled up on his arm.

At the appointed hour the two cabs full of Atherdales and their belongings rattled into the railway station. Mrs. Atherdale, with little Lizzie and Letty, occupied one of the vehicles; the other carried an un-

usually heavy freight of romance and youth and beauty, in the shape of the two betrothed couples. Arrived at the station, the two parties mingled into one, and the whole troop filed on to the platform. There they first perceived Geoffrey's tall figure mounting guard over a pile of small baggage, and next, his wife and her sister making purchases at a bookstall. Then arose a chorus :

"Here we are! How are you? All well? In good time, are not we? So glad to meet again. How well you look!"

After these greetings came the questions, asked of Geoffrey Atherdale by the other branches of the wide-spreading family tree :

"Why are you not stopping in London? Why did you not come to us? We could have taken you all three in. Why would you not stay a few days?"

"If I had stayed a few days, I might have stayed on. If I am to go to Saxby, I go at once. It's my way always to strike while the iron's hot, you know," replied Geoffrey.

"Well, Elma my dear, how are you? How long it is since we have seen you. You are looking very well; are you quite strong now?" said Mrs. Atherdale.

"Quite strong; stronger than ever, thank you."

"You have grown too, I think. Dora has grown; don't you think she is taller?"

"A little taller, but not altered," replied Elma, smiling cordially as she regarded Dora.

Elma was more beautiful than ever ; her girlish grace had matured into a more womanly charm ; her slender figure had developed into fuller and more statuesque outlines. The same sweetness and self-possession characterised her manner as of old ; the same calmly bright smile was on her lips. Only it was with a shade less of frank playful archness than of old, that she answered Carlos when he spoke to her ; it was with a little less of fascinating humility that she appealed to Alfred. But she spoke very little to either of the young men, nor they to her. They met with a bare "how do you do?" and exchanged only casual remarks. She did not congratulate Alfred on his engagement, although she whispered gentle and sincere good wishes to Christine. She remarked to Carlos, during a few brief minutes that they happened to stand near together :

"Dora looks so pretty to-day ; you are very much to be congratulated ! I wish you all happiness."

"Thank you. She does look well, I must say, though I know it's not the thing to entertain one lady by another's praises."

"Under these circumstances it is not only allowable, but praiseworthy," said Elma smiling.

Words with so little of freedom and so much of formality, had never passed between Carlos and Elma in the old days. She felt this, and felt it with a twinge of regret for the pleasant intimacy that evidently was no more.

When the train started, the party of ten divided themselves into two carriages. Dora and Christine, escorted by their respective fiancés, went in one, and Mrs. Atherdale, with Geoffrey, Ina, and the two little girls, in another. Elma at the last moment got hustled towards the wrong carriage, saw a portly couple climb into Mrs. Atherdale's compartment before her, and found herself occupying the fifth seat in the compartment of which the affianced couples had taken possession. Elma made a wry face internally as she discovered she was playing the rôle of double gooseberry and chaperone to two pairs of lovers. She however behaved herself with exemplary discretion. She leant back modestly in her corner, replied briefly, though courteously, to remarks made to her, read a railway novel half the way, and pretended to dose the other half.

Meanwhile in the other carriage, Mrs. Atherdale (or rather more properly speaking, now, Mrs. Edwin Atherdale, Ina having become Mrs. Atherdale *par excellence*, as wife of the elder brother), Mrs. Edwin Atherdale then, availed herself of Elma's absence to inquire about Elma's engagement. Was it broken off? was it still going on? how was it nothing more was heard of it?

"Well," replied Ina Atherdale, "I do not think it was wise of Elma to accept him. She does not really care about him, I am quite sure; he is by her account not a very intelligent young man, nor one at all likely

to inspire a girl like Elma with a real attachment. She accepted him, I believe, on an impulse—partly through a doctrine that her aunt always lays down, that a girl will bitterly regret it if she refuses any man without a practical reason. Then he went away to Ireland on duty, and she has not seen him since. They correspond, but just now there is some little disagreement by letter; his parents seem to have some objection. Disagreements by letter are very dangerous things always; but in this case there is no very deep attachment at stake—not on Elma's side at least."

"She looks quite well and happy," said Mrs. Edwin Atherdale rather disapprovingly. "Has she much feeling, my dear? Can she ever really care for any one?"

"Oh, yes. Elma is not at all deficient in feeling. She is capable of very strong affections."

"Is she? I should not have fancied it."

When they arrived at Burlford Station, they found three carriages awaiting them by Geoffrey's order, to convey them to Saxby Towers. All the party insisted that Geoffrey and his wife should occupy the leading carriage by themselves; Mrs. Edwin Atherdale, Alfred, Christine, and one of the little girls, went in the second; Carlos, Dora, and Elma, with the elder of the children, occupied the third. Geoffrey demurred at allowing four to ride in each carriage, while two places were to spare in his; but they quieted him by protestations that the vacant seats would be more

useful to them if they might pile up their bags, baskets, and parcels there, assuring him furthermore that they had "plenty of room, as the children really counted for nothing." So the cavalcade drove off, Geoffrey and Ina alone in the leading vehicle.

It was daylight when they left the station, but the early December twilight began to fall before the drive was done.

The two hinder carriages were full of talk and mirth, of love-making and laughter. In the first, where the owner of Saxby Towers rode with his one month's wife, there was silence.

Ina was habituated to Geoffrey's long silences, and they did not jar upon nor fret her peaceful nature. Her hand was in his; and although field after wood, and wood after field, seemed to roll by them, without rousing a remark or a word from him, she was neither curious nor disturbed, and did not question him. In the depths of her heart she half dreaded the arrival at the Towers, lest it should cloud him with the deep gloom she had learned to know and fear, for his sake more than her own. Yet she wished to be there, to set that dread at rest.

They had been driving about an hour, and Geoffrey had spoken about three words. They knew that they must be nearing Saxby Towers when Ina suddenly recognised a little white gabled cottage by the roadside as her childhood's home—the home where she and her baby brothers and sisters had played, and where

the body of her eldest sister had been brought home one summer evening. As she leant forward, looking earnestly upon the spot, but not uttering her recognition aloud, the memory flashed upon her with startling vividness of that evening when Viola had been brought home dead. She heard again the confused crunching of the men's steps upon the gravel—saw the covered burthen they bore, the white gleam of the dripping dress that drooped over the side of the shutter, just as she had seen it before her nurse caught her away and called her in. All this was four and twenty years ago; she had been but a four-year-old child then; and yet the whole scene flashed into life before her now as if it had passed but yesterday. She shuddered and looked at Geoffrey, for it was yet light enough to read his face, wondering whether any such vivid recollection was in his mind, wishing that she could shield him from the memories that must beset him here.

He was looking blankly and resolutely forward, as if fixed in a determination not to turn his eyes upon the white-walled cottage and its long garden. His stern sad face bore no traces of emotion; only there was a look upon it as of a steadfast resolve "not to yield."

She watched him, and watched him still, as the dimly-outlined hedges flew by, and the twilight gathered, and they drew nearer and nearer to their goal. "Geoffrey?" she said at last softly, laying her hand upon his shoulder.

"Well, Ina?"

Her eyes questioned him ; she said nothing more ; but he answered the unspoken inquiry.

"The Past is past. I am not thinking of the past. I am not going to think of it. Let us forget it. It is done with."

"So be it," she agreed with earnest tenderness.

They arrived at the great gates, which were promptly thrown open at the sound of wheels. The three carriages rolled through the gates in procession, past the lodge where the lodge-keeper stood hat in hand, with his wife curtsying at his side, up the drive, and stopped by the hall door.

The door was open ; the hall was lighted up ; and in the broad flood of light from the door, two men-servants hastened down the steps.

"Mr. Atherdale? We bid you humbly welcome, sir," said one as he held the door open for Geoffrey to alight.

"Mr. Geoffrey—I beg pardon, Mr. Atherdale, sir ! is it really you? You'll have forgotten me," exclaimed the other and elder one.

"What, is it Forester? No, I've not forgotten you. But you're changed, Forester, like me."

Geoffrey stood on the threshold of his own home, and looked around him with his calm, keen, all-observing glance. Tall and erect, with his massive fair beard, his heavy fur-lined coat buttoned up to his chin, a grey felt hat with a broad curled brim pulled

over his brows, there was something strange and "outlandish" in his appearance to the eyes of the expectant and attendant domestics in the hall. The lady who stood by his side, dressed with faultless elegance, and receiving her welcome gracefully and graciously, perhaps pleased them more, but impressed them less, than their falcon-eyed, thoughtful-browed, new master.

The other carriages drew up, and set their freight down; the housekeeper and two maids came forward to show the ladies to their rooms.

Saxby Towers had been originally a long oblong building with a tower at each end. Two wings had been added to it, running back from the two towers, so as to enclose three sides of a square, and form a courtyard. The dining and drawing rooms lay on either side of the entrance hall; one of the round tower-rooms on the ground-floor was a library, the other a morning room or boudoir; one of the wings was principally given up to servants' rooms and domestic offices; the other contained a long room used for dancing or large parties. The upper rooms in the towers were called the "first round-room," "second round-room," and so on, and were fitted up as spare single bed-rooms. There was ample accommodation and to spare, for all the party; and according to Geoffrey's written orders, everything was prepared for their comfort; bright fires blazed on every bedroom hearth; tall candles burnt on every toilette

table. Dinner was ready by the time that they had laid aside their outer travelling attire and descended.

They all flocked round Geoffrey with exclamations of, "Oh, what a dear old place!" and "How charming everything is!"

"It is a most interesting old house. I shall enjoy exploring it by daylight," observed Alfred.

"It's real splendid—the whole thing," said Carlos comprehensively.

"You like it, boys?" said Geoffrey. "That's well."

He had stood the arrival and the welcome home, better than his wife had feared he might. The pleasant excitement of his guests, the delight of the young girls, and the chattering of little Letty and Lizzie, as, one holding each hand of Uncle Geoff, they had pulled him along the passages, exploring—all this had kept him as yet from the morbid brooding which Ina had dreaded. She felt easy and at peace now.

"Ina, I envy you this place! I really do; it is beautiful," observed Elma.

"It is your home, dear, too—your home as well as mine, as long as you choose," replied her sister affectionately.

"And now, my dearest girls, my two sweet daughters? are you happy? are you glad to be here? do you like it?" inquired Mrs. Edwin Atherdale, taking a hand each of Dora and Christine.

The thought was in her mind that one or other of

these two girls whom she loved, might very probably some day rule as mistress over Saxby Towers. If Geoffrey had no son, he would most likely settle this, his estate, either upon Alfred or Carlos. So that even if her beloved boy Alfred were not chosen the heir, her daughter Dora, as Carlos's wife, would be mistress of the Towers. Either Alfred and Christine, or Carlos and Dora, would almost certainly be rulers there, if only Geoffrey left no son !

And the chance of one of her children possessing Saxby Towers, was a pleasing reflection to Mrs. Atherdale ; although she would not for worlds have admitted to her dearest friend that she ever calculated on the chance, and although she was sincerely and genuinely attached to her brother-in-law and his new wife.





## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SECOND ALTAR.

L'homme aujourd'hui sème la cause ;  
Demain Dieu fait mûrir l'effet.—*Victor Hugo.*

**F**OR two days all went well and happily at Saxby Towers. Things ran smoothly without a hitch or jar of any kind. Some of the resident gentry of the neighbourhood called, and were cordial in their welcome to Geoffrey Atherdale and his wife. The uncertainty of the weather prevented them from taking more than short walks, or thoroughly exploring the neighbourhood ; but although they thus spent a great portion of their time indoors, no hour of the time hung heavy. There was plenty to be said and done, plenty of placid amusement, and nobody fathomed the depth of dulness that is possible, although fortunately not inevitable, in a large quiet country house.

Then came Sunday. The whole of the many-branched family of the Atherdales went to church and filled two pews, and were gazed at by all, and had their bonnets and mantles criticised by the feminine portion

of the congregation. Of course a great curiosity prevailed in the neighbourhood about the bride, whose "first appearance in public" might be regarded as taking place this Sunday. They could not all restrain their curiosity entirely until the service was over. "Which is she?" whispered the neighbours who did not know to the neighbours who did. Most of them, however, postponed until they left church the volley of inquiries and cross-fire of comments and items of information with which their minds were charged.

"Her bonnet became her sweetly!"

"But she ought not to wear blue."

"She is pretty."

"Do you think so?"

"Who is the girl in pink?"

"Her sister."

"Has he married all the family? Are they all her relations?"

"No indeed, all *his*. All Atherdales."

"Are those two little girls her children?"

"No, can't be; she doesn't look above four and twenty."

"Four-and-twenty! oh! nearer thirty."

"Full thirty; those pale, fair skins never look their age."

"Handsome girl, her sister. Why didn't he choose her?"

"Why he might be the girl's father—grandfather. He's a good twenty years older than his wife as it is."

There was not quite this difference between Geoffrey and his wife, but as the remarks did not reach their ears they were not perturbed by mistakes. Ina was not wholly unconscious—what woman ever is? of the attention she attracted. She knew it; and knowing, too, that (from the blue *aigrette* in her bonnet to the tips of the perfectly-gloved fingers that daintily clasped her ivory Prayer-book) her toilette was perfect, she did not dislike it. Of course her mind was full of sweet and serious thoughts; and the consciousness of being the cynosure of many feminine eyes only skimmed the surface of her feelings.

Geoffrey for his part was totally heedless and unconscious of the outside world and its attention. Far other thoughts were at work in his brain. Even Ina, with all her loving intuition, could never guess the memories that crowded upon him—a train of shadows from the grave. That opposite pew to theirs, where the clergyman's family sat now, Geoffrey remembered well who sat there always once. His eyes were fixed upon the people who filled that pew, but saw them not. He only saw a girl like Elma, but with a redder glow in the gold-brown hair, a more subtle droop in the lids of the almond-shaped eyes. The memory was so vivid—the past rose up giant-like and trampled on the present. Ina was by his side; and yet that past stretched a ghostly arm between them and said, "You are not hers, but Mine!"

When the stream of the congregation poured out of

the church, and the Atherdale party steered their way along together, the young people keeping up a buzz of talk, the elder ones catching and returning bows and smiles from such of the neighbours who knew them, Geoffrey was in one of his grave and unconversational moods. Nobody ever minded however whether Geoffrey was conversational or not. He was understood and privileged. He walked home very taciturnly, and was laconic at luncheon. After the meal was over, he said to Ina :

“ Put on your bonnet and a warm cloak. It is not going to rain any more, I think ; and I want you to come for a walk with me.”

Ina promptly complied.

“ Which way are you going ? ” she said as they went out of the grounds.

“ This way,” pronounced Geoffrey, turning again into the road leading to the church. He took the way straight to the churchyard, unlatched the little gate, and held it open for Ina to enter. A few steps inside the gate he paused and looked around searchingly.

Ina did not ask him why he had brought her there ; she generally knew, by the sure instinct of love, when a question was likely to pain or jar upon him ; and this day she felt intuitively, as he scanned the churchyard slowly round, what was the motive with which he had led her there, and for what grave he sought. She almost wondered at his doing this thing, and was inclined to attribute his conduct, in all probability

rightly, to a resolution to prove his own stoicism, an experiment on his own powers. Geoffrey was one of those men who, to test his strength or to carry out any theory of self-analysis, would have placed his hand in the fire and let it burn.

They trod through the damp grass, threading their way between the graves ; Geoffrey leading, and Ina following unquestioningly, until they reached the stone to which his unerring memory directed him.

It was a plain white headstone, bearing the simple inscription :

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF  
VIOLA, DAUGHTER OF HAROLD DALZIEL,  
Who died on the 15th of July, 1838.

*Aged 20 years*

The grass grew wild and free from the headstone to the footstone of this grave ; the low footstone indeed was half buried in the tall wet grass. One grave near it was a pretty little railed-in flower-garden ; over another a climbing rose-bush was carefully trained ; on one marble cross hung faded wreaths of autumn flowers, and round another a Virginia creeper grew gracefully. Most of the tombs indeed bore some token of the cherishing care of surviving friends ; but on the grave of Viola Dalziel grew only the long wild waving grass.

Geoffrey laid his hand upon the headstone, as if to

realize it by touch as well as sight. Ina fully felt the solemn and sad significance of this moment, when she and her husband stood by the grave of the woman whom he had loved so long ago, who was her sister, and whom yet she remembered but very dimly. There at his feet lay mouldering into dust unseen, all that was left on earth of the girl he had loved once. Here by his side stood the wife whom he loved now. In his heart was the old tomb sealed up? or did the door of the sepulchre burst open now and here? Was there a resurrection of the dead love? Surely it must rival the living even yet. Else, if the old love could be forgotten, what faith could be built on the endurance of the new? These were Ina's reflections, or rather her feelings, by Viola's grave—a sense of awe, and solemn mystery, mingled with the natural conjecturings of a loving heart and sensitive imagination. But when she looked at Geoffrey, a keener pain seized her; a sudden anxiety fell like an iron weight upon her heart. More than the memory of love, more than the sadness of death, she read in his face; a despair of anguish, a desperate and hopeless struggle was written there. His breath came short, and his hand contracted with a stern clasp of pain on the cold damp stone.

“Geoffrey, oh, Geoffrey! why did you come?” she whispered beseechingly, half reproachfully, slipping both her hands through his arm and nestling to his side. He did not answer; he did not look at her;

but he pressed her hands and drew her even nearer to him. She looked at him until the yearning love, the longing intensity of her gaze magnetically forced his eyes to fix at last on her.

"What do you want me to say?" he said, as if her look was a question; there was something strange in his voice, but his manner was tender to her.

"Nothing, dear; some things are better left unspoken, and are well understood so," she answered softly.

"Left unspoken, yes. So! we'll leave it unspoken, Ina. Unspoken—buried—sealed up. All but one thing! One thing shall be said. I take your hand again, here. I hold you mine, my own, here. This stone is the second altar where I bind you to myself. Till Death do us part! You are mine till death."

"And after! if my faith and hope be fulfilled," she said earnestly.

"After?" he repeated questioningly, painfully. "On the other side of the grave, who knows what ghosts may be waiting for us?"

"None, surely, that could part us?"

"Ah, you trust me, Ina? you think me fit to go up to a heaven with you?"

"Yes, I trust you."

Geoffrey was silent, with a stern and bitter regret upon his face.

"Now, we have not done our day's work yet, Ina,"

he said abruptly, after a pause. "There's more to do that *shall* be done."

"I am not tired," she assured him gently.

"That's well," he said. "Let us go."

They left the churchyard and returned to the Saxby grounds. Instead of taking the path towards the house, Geoffrey went a way that was new to Ina, a way that led far away from the house, and to a rustic bridge over the river. When Ina saw the river, an idea struck her ; when she noticed the wooden bridge, the idea became certainty. Her heart sank strangely as she reflected on this pilgrimage of Geoffrey's to the two very spots that in all the neighbourhood were the fullest of most painful associations to him. She did not exactly think that it was unnatural ; in a man of Geoffrey's peculiar disposition nothing seemed unnatural ; and this voluntary seeking, so soon upon his domicilement at the Towers, of the bitter memories which some day or other if he lived there must be brought before him, was perhaps not surprising. Still she felt a strange dread and wonder and anxiety growing in her heart. In the silence that under these circumstances, with those two natures, was a matter of course, he led her to the bank of the river and stood looking from the bridge to the water, and from the water to the bridge again. Then he said, almost in a whisper, stepping on the bridge, "Will you come?" and held out his hand to help her. She went with him across the uneven planks ; in the middle he stood

still, she of course by his side. Here it was, she knew, that her sister had met her death—here that Geoffrey had risked his life to save her! Here, on this very spot! The river was deep and rapid here; the running water dazzled Ina's eyes, and the plashing of the breaking ripples seemed to make her head spin. She was nervous and over-wrought; she clung to Geoffrey's arm tremblingly; she looked at him, and his face frightened her.

"Geoffrey, let us go home!" she whispered in a quivering voice.

What thoughts were in his mind as he stood there still as a stone, God only knew! He took no notice of his wife's entreaty until she reiterated it in a still more pleading whisper. Then he seemed to wake up from a spell, and took her back to the bank carefully. When she found herself walking with him on the homeward path once more, her nerves ceased to vibrate so tremulously, and the vague dread and anxiety lightened off her heart a little by degrees.

She noticed as she leant on Geoffrey's arm that now and then a shudder shook his frame.

"You are very pale, dear," she ventured to say at last. "I wish we had not come out to-day—for your sake."

"I thought I was strong enough, Ina," he replied in a low broken voice. "I find I ought not to have done it. It was foolhardy of me. I'm sorry. I ought not to have tried the experiment."

When they got home, he sent Ina to join their guests in the drawing-room, and locked himself in his own study and dressing-room.

Ina told them very little of their walk, and said that she thought Geoffrey was tired. After a cup of tea, she went up to him and tapped at the locked door. He opened it when he found she was there alone, and shut it when she had entered.

"Geoffrey dear, how pale you are still ! You look ill. *Are you ill ?*" she said anxiously.

"Yes, I'm ill, I think," he answered shortly.

"Have you caught cold ? Are you in any pain ?"

"Yes ; never mind ; it's nothing ! don't tease me with questions."

It was the first time that he had ever used an impatient expression to her.

"I did not mean to tease you," she said gently, but looking hurt.

"No, no, I know. Be patient with me, Ina," he said, stretching out his hand.

She forgot the impatient word in a second ; she put her arms round his neck caressingly, and looked at him with tears of love and yearning and tenderness in her eyes. It was a sore trial to her to see him suffer either mentally or physically and be unable to help him.

"What can I do for you, darling ?" she whispered softly.

"Nothing, Ina dear."

"Will you not lie down? You are cold; your hands are like ice; lie down and let me cover you with a shawl."

"Yes," he said, "I will. Tell them I'll not be down to dinner to-day, and don't let any one come after me."

Ina obeyed his injunctions; and every one uttered their regret at Geoffrey's indisposition, and speculated as to whether it was rheumatism, bronchitis, or influenza that ailed him. The host was missed sincerely at the dinner-table.

The first little cloud had drifted across the clear horizon.

At dinner Alfred sat between Elma and Christine, and, the conversation turning principally on music and painting, he talked a great deal to Elma, who was tolerably "well up" in the biographies of artistic celebrities. It was to her he devoted more of his attention than to his cousin and betrothed, Christine. Carlos, seated opposite them, was a model fiancé, devoting ninety-nine per cent. of his attention to Dora, and dividing the remaining fraction between his two aunts. Two or three days together under the same roof had worn off the first slight reserve and restraint between Elma and Alfred and Carlos. But while Carlos still gave his entire attention to the legitimate recipient thereof, Alfred now began to bestow a share of his conversation on Elma. Christine was an attentive listener, but Elma was more intellectually appreciative, and also better

cultivated. Christine's conversation was a thing of every day, while Elma's possessed a combined charm of novelty and old association. There is certainly no reason why a young man "engaged" should too openly advertise his devotion to the fair object, and render himself and her conspicuous in the eyes of servants, friends, and strangers. There was no undue *empressement* in Alfred Atherdale's attention to Elma, even when after dinner that evening he drew a chair close to the sofa where she sat, and continued the conversation commenced at the dinner-table. Christine was sitting by Elma, and Alfred looked and spoke with due frequency to his betrothed. Still Carlos glanced at the trio several times, with a glance that was scarcely of satisfaction, and yet that, unperceived by them, dwelt upon them long, and recurred to them over and over again.

Elma was looking splendidly beautiful that night, in a rich, long black silk dress that fitted her statuesquely modelled figure to perfection. Her bright brown hair was coiled up high on her head; and her head was poised upon the white graceful column of her throat like a tall stately lily on its stem. There was something queenly about her, girl as she was, from the calm glance of her brilliant dark eyes, to the thoughtful half smile that hovered on her lips, and the tranquil pose of her figure. She cast Christine's sweet feminine fairness and Dora's mignonne prettiness quite into shade. Carlos could not help looking at her;

her beauty compelled his eyes to fix and feast on it against his will. But he never spoke to her nor went near her, nor stirred from Dora's side ; not even when Elma's lovely eyes met his, and held out a gentle mute invitation to him to join in the conversation.

"I shall wear my hair like Elma's to-morrow," remarked Dora to Christine, when the two girls were alone having a goodnight chat as they unmade their toilette. "With a little frissette, I am sure I could do it exactly. Alfred said it was so pretty ; did you hear him paying her compliments about it ?"

"Yes," said Alfred's betrothed frankly, "of course I did."

"Carlos doesn't pay her a bit of attention," continued Dora, well satisfied with the superior devotion of her own lover ; "but Alfred has been talking a great deal to her to-night, hasn't he ?"

"Yes ; she is clever, and he enjoys a bit of talk with her," replied Christine placidly, but did not encourage Dora to dwell on the subject.

She was not going to be so silly as to tease Alfred with petty jealousies, because he showed a polite attention towards a young lady who was their fellow guest in the house, she resolved. And even if she had felt jealousy, she would not have confided it to Dora ; nor would she in her inmost heart have experienced a shadow of anger against Alfred, who in her eyes could do no wrong.

Alfred and Carlos generally sat together talking a

little while at night, but this night neither of them seemed conversationally inclined; they wished each other good-night and separated. Carlos felt vexed with he knew not what; and unreasonably disturbed. His eye distinguished a second little cloud overhanging the horizon of their life at Saxby.

Ina and Elma met as usual in the latter's room.

"How is Geoffrey now, dear?"

"He seems very far from well, but he will not let me even suggest a doctor, and stops his ears at the name of medicine," replied Ina.

"Men are so odd," remarked Elma consolingly. "Don't be anxious, Ina, darling; he will be all right to-morrow, I dare say."

"Yes, I hope—I think so. I wanted to ask you, Elma, but I have not had an opportunity all to-day—did you not have a letter from Captain Jarvis by this morning's post?"

"Yes, I did, Ina; and I shall never have another!"

"Is it all over then, dear?"

"Yes. You must have seen that for the last fortnight the correspondence has been—well! not of the most hopeful and happy and lover-like kind! And now it is done with, and I am glad. I was an idiot, Ina, but this has taught me to know myself a little; and I will never be such a weak idiot again!"

"I was afraid it had been a mistake from the first, darling. You never cared for him, did you?"

"Never, Ina. I drifted into it. I supposed I should

learn to care for him. If he had felt for me what I call love, I should have loved him back, I am sure. But on his side it was a fancy—on mine a folly—the folly of being flattered by my first offer. I might have drifted into a marriage cursed by present poverty and unblessed by any real love—with vague “expectations” from a disapproving father as the brightest ray of light! It was an escape. I am very, very thankful.”

“And so am I for your sake. But how has it happened now, dear? How has the escape been brought about?”

“Well, I suppose there was too little patience and too much pride about my letters when I learnt his father was not best pleased. Then he was huffed; then I was cold; then finally he said it rested in my hands, and if I wished it he was quite ready to release me from my engagement. And I thought it was the wisest thing he ever said; and I very nearly as good as told him so. I believed it would be the best for both of us; but I was not going to sneak out of it, and he was to write and tell me if he agreed with me—and—there! so it ended, Ina, and I am tired of it and glad it's done with!”

“You certainly never could have cared one straw for him,” said Ina, watching her sister with a little surprise and somewhat wondering interest. “I should like to know, dearie, whether you have ever cared for any one?”

“No—no—no!” answered Elma, shaking her head, putting her arms round her sister caressingly, and looking up at her with honest eyes. “I have flirted with plenty of men, and enjoyed it; but I never had a Geoffrey! No one ever was to me what he, from the very first days you knew him, was to you! I thought I noticed something in your manner to each other even then, in that early time! No, Ina! I am not so fortunate as you.”

“I do not feel very fortunate to-night, dear,” said Ina with a sigh.





## CHAPTER XIV.

“KEEP YOUR FINGERS OUT OF THE FIRE.”

A tender beauteous love,  
That grows upon his haunted heart  
Like a scented bloom on a madhouse wall!  
—*Beddoes.*

**T**HE two little clouds that had floated into the atmosphere of the family party at Saxby Towers, did not pass away. They were only little clouds certainly; but there, such as they were, they hung overhead, not lessening nor dissolving, and showing no sign of drifting out of sight.

Geoffrey's indisposition—although the day after it began he came down to luncheon and took a walk in the garden—was a fact not to be ignored. Alfred's division of his attentions between Elma and Christine was equally a fact; although a fiancée more exigeante, and less gentle and unsuspicious than Christine would have found it difficult to accuse him of any actual negligence or coldness. This cloud was a little speck in the sky which no one acknowledged to seeing or suspecting.

It must be said, in justice to Elma, that she had no intention either of monopolising Alfred, or of annoying or distressing Christine. She was accustomed to receive a certain amount of attention from every man she knew, and she enjoyed conversations on many of Alfred's favourite topics, and saw no reason why she should not allow herself that harmless enjoyment. She never took his attention away from Christine ; she only shared it with her. For the first day or so at Saxby Towers, Elma had certainly conducted herself with a marvellous precision and care, and had kept herself scrupulously out of the way of the affianced couples as if she had been a motherly and considerate dowager. But this unnatural restraint quite naturally wore off. And when Elma was natural, her very look was coquetry—her very tone a temptation to mankind. She could not help it ; she was born a flirt ; and was of that too common feminine type of character which always "*means* no harm," and very often does a great deal.

Alfred also had at first been a model of discretion. He had started his visit to Saxby with a scrupulous devotion to his own especial fiancée ; and had grown gradually out of that exclusiveness.

Carlos was a model lover still, and gave Dora no cause whatever to be dissatisfied, no excuse for a shadow of pique or jealousy. She was generally quick to resent and take offence ; but even her sensitive vanity was not wounded by any word or look of his to

Elma Dalziel. But although Dora's feelings were sensitive on the point of her own pre-eminence, her perceptions were not deep. She seldom looked below the surface.

Geoffrey continued far from well ; but he utterly declined to be petted or pitied or sympathised with, and would not allow the word "doctor" to be mentioned. He would come down stairs late in the day, and return to his room before dinner, saying he could not eat ; he shunned society, and even shut himself up from Ina for hours. Every day he professed to be better, yet every day he looked worse, and Ina's anxiety grew deeper. The only person whom Geoffrey ever sent expressly for, and seemed desirous of having by his side, was Carlos. He would ask Ina to "fetch Carlos" to his room when he was lying down ; he would send for Carlos to talk to him whenever he was feeling well enough to talk, and inclined for a chat about the old times in the country they had left behind, and on which they both, and they alone, of all there, could sympathise. He would take Carlos's arm when he went out in the grounds for a short walk in the sunshine. Alfred was always readily and graciously at his uncle's service ; but Geoffrey liked his other nephew's stronger arm to lean upon.

He was nervous and inclined to be irritable now ; he sometimes watched the manners of every member of the party with a sort of restless interest and curiosity ; he seemed to be always anticipating something un-

pleasant looming ahead. It might be that physical indisposition affected him mentally ; it might be that some mental anxiety and disturbance increased that indisposition. The mental and the physical are very closely allied, especially in nervous temperaments like Geoffrey Atherdale's ; and in his case it was difficult to distinguish whether mental disquietude was the cause or the effect of physical weakness. The only thing certain was, that he was ill, and that he was moody.

One day when he lounged into the drawing-room quietly and unexpectedly, Elma was kneeling on the hearth-rug, prettily spreading out her hands before the fire to warm, and looking up at Alfred, who was standing by the mantelpiece. Lizzie and Lettie were at the table, bending their two little curly heads together over an illustrated book, quite oblivious of the other two occupants of the room.

Geoffrey took in the picture at a glance, before they noticed and greeted him, and surrounded him with offers of armchairs and attention. He felt chilly—as most people, who were not kneeling on the hearthrug almost in the grate, felt chilly that December day—and allowed himself to be installed in the easiest chair in the warmest corner by the fire, and accepted the cushions Elma brought him, looking at her with rather unusual earnestness ; for he had but little conversation with, and bestowed but little outward attention on, his fair sister-in-law as a rule, beyond placing every com-

fort and luxury in his power at her disposal with unlimited good-will and hospitality. This day, however, he looked more at her than at any one else in the room ; as she stood with the point of one little velvet-shod foot on the low fender (for Elma loved fire in winter as well as sun in summer), a graceful, bright, attractive presence enough to fix any man's attention.

"Where's Christine, Alfred?" asked Geoffrey.

"Getting ready to go out, I believe, uncle."

"Well, little maids, and are you going to pore over books all day instead of taking a run to warm these cold little fingers?" Geoffrey said, patting Letty's hand.

"We're going out with Alfred and Chrissy."

"But Alfred and Chrissy don't run as fast as you do, do they? You are not going to join these pedestrians, Elma, I suppose?"

"No. I took one turn round the grounds this morning, and it was enough! The wind blew my hair almost off my head, and nearly cut my nose off into the bargain."

"You should pin your hair on more securely," observed Geoffrey with a half-smile.

"Implying that it isn't my own? I have half a mind to shake it down and show you, only it takes me half an hour to plait!" she said, running her fingers lightly and playfully over the thick bright braids of brown hair.

When Alfred and his little sisters had gone to join Christine in a walk, Elma deliberated with herself whether she should discreetly and delicately retire from the tête-à-tête with her brother-in-law, leaving him to read or dose according to his pleasure, or whether she should stay and try to amuse him. If there was one person in the world of whom this self-possessed young beauty felt a trifle shy, it was Geoffrey. He himself decided for her now, by pointing to a chair opposite him, and asking her to sit down.

"How old are you, Elma?" he inquired curiously, after looking at her in silence.

"Nineteen—turned nineteen—twenty next spring," she replied, getting to the exact truth at last.

"You are sure you are only that? You are not twenty-four?"

"No! good gracious, do I look twenty-four?" exclaimed Elma, startled into a very frank exclamation of half comic dismay.

"No, you don't," Geoffrey reassured her.

Here the door was flung open, and Carlos came in. Geoffrey's falcon eyes noted how instantly and how admiringly, and yet involuntarily, his nephew's look fixed upon Elma, and with how bright and playful a smile she greeted him, as she appealed to him with a pretty turn of her head.

"How old should *you* take me for?"

"I know," he said. "You're turned nineteen; you'll be twenty in April."

"Yes, the last day of April," she corroborated him.

"You see the young fellows remember," said Geoffrey. "The old fellows like me have to ask."

"And don't always believe when they are told!" added Elma laughingly.

Geoffrey barely smiled. He was not in a smiling humour that day, and Elma's bright fair face and fresh tuneful voice half fascinated and half annoyed him. He turned to his wife's peaceful softness with more than love—with something of eager relief, as a man dazzled with the bright sun-glare turns to the cool shadow of green trees. When he was alone with Ina, he said to her moodily and reluctantly—as if he hated the subject and yet felt unable to resist referring to it:

"Elma grows more beautiful every day, it seems. She is not twenty yet, she tells me."

"Twenty next April."

"The girl haunts me to-day, somehow," he said impatiently. "I was dreaming of her last night—dreadful feverish dreams. I do not know what is the matter with me, Ina; but morbid ideas take possession of me—and I can't get them out of my head. Elma is like a vampire to me to-day!"

"A vampire! Why, Geoffrey dearest! what is it you mean?"

"She is like the dead reanimated," he said gloomily.

And then Ina, remembering Elma's likeness to the portraits of Viola, knew what he meant. He added, as if the words broke from him involuntarily in reverie :

"I dreamt last night the two were one ! But Elma is only twenty—and it was four and twenty years ago."

Ina put her arms round his neck lovingly and anxiously.

"Oh, Geoffrey dear !" she said with a tone of pain.

"I'm not mad !" he said. "I know well enough what an absurd fancy it sounds. But you know I've been superstitious from my boyhood. And now I am not well—and things dwell on me—and I dream."

"You are ill, darling ; that is it. What can I do to help drive these feverish fancies away ?"

"Nothing, dear. There ! think no more of them. I was foolish to say anything—you'll think me crazy ! To-night I'll sleep sound and dream no more," he said reassuringly.

And as if to set her mind quite at ease, he began to talk absently to her on other subjects, and tried to seem well ; but no attempts could disguise the fact that he was very far from well in mind or body.

Carlos used sometimes to read aloud to his uncle ; and this evening Geoffrey called him into his room to read some American papers which had arrived by that mail, and to which Geoffrey could listen, or seem to listen, lying back in his chair at peace, not obliged to converse. The *Times* took its turn when the American

papers were disposed of ; and Geoffrey took advantage of Ina's absence to point to the column of marriages and inquire :

"Carlos, when is it that you and Dora are going to figure in this column?"

"Well, we have about fixed for June next, the same time as Alfred and Christine."

"In June—that's a long way off! Carlos, boy, keep your fingers out of the fire," said Geoffrey abstractedly.

"Out of what fire?" asked the young man, his clear frank eyes questioning his uncle as straightforwardly as his words, but the colour heightening on his cheek as the answer flashed across his mind before Geoffrey spoke.

"The fire that older men than you have got burnt up and consumed in. That's all I've got to say. If you know what I mean, it's enough; if you don't, it's enough or too much."

"Is this a general caution? or against one particular person? Speak out, Uncle Geoff; you'll not hurt *me*; and I'll swear to say nothing to vex *you*."

"Sisters may be of the same blood, but they are not always of the same nature. Ina is true and pure as Heaven itself. Elma is dangerous," replied Geoffrey, speaking out with sudden plainness.

"I am shielded from any such danger. There is Dora," answered Carlos as frankly.

"That is well, boy. There is little Dora," said Geoffrey, and said no more.

Carlos had been truthful in his assurance that he believed himself shielded by his affection for Dora against the influence of Elma Dalziel. But he knew full well that a shield and a safeguard were necessary; and more than that, he found it needful to assure himself as well as Geoffrey, to reiterate in his heart as well as with his lips, that the safeguard he possessed was a sufficient protection. He did not then know the power of the weapon nor the fragility of the shield.





## CHAPTER XV.

### TEMPTED.

As a meek star dies  
When slow resistless daylight fills the skies,  
So softly waned that love—when one deferred  
Transcendent passion lit my life, its sun !

—*Marston.*

**T** was the morning after those morbid fancies and suspicions about Elma had entered Geoffrey's head, fancies of which the object of them of course was totally unaware, and which he himself to-day seemed to have forgotten. It was near the time that the post went out from Saxby Towers, when Carlos crossed the hall with a packet of letters, and was standing by the post-bag on one of the large fur mats that strewed the tile pavement of the hall. It happened that the library door close by was slightly ajar ; it happened also that Carlos, who always walked with a long quiet step, made no noise in crossing the matted hall. As he slipped the first letter into the bag, he heard a voice in the library close to him, saying :

“ Shall I ever forget that day—Elma ? ”

The voice was Alfred's ; the tone was one which, but for the name, Carlos could not have doubted was addressed to Christine.

He would not be guilty of eavesdropping for a moment ; he followed his only impulse—the impulse which sent him always straight and headlong to his object, the sort of impetus which in a charge of cavalry carves a road right through the ranks of the enemy. Into the enemy's camp Carlos marched on the instant. Giving Elma no time to reply, Alfred no time to continue, he flung the door open and turned the tête-à-tête into a trio.

They both looked startled and a little confused. Alfred held his head up with some hauteur ; Elma called a smile to her lips, with a sparkle of vexation in her eyes and a quick blush mantling in her cheeks.

"Any letters for the post ?" said Carlos abruptly.

"I have one," said Alfred, producing it from a blotter on the table.

"I have none," observed Elma.

"I've just put mine in," said Carlos, and then there was a pause.

Carlos was resolved not to leave Alfred and Elma together ; Elma was equally resolved that the two young men should not be left alone together. Her subtle instinct read the possibility of some collision between them in both their manners. Determined not to leave the library, she sat down, and began turning over some papers. Equally determined,

Carlos also sat down, and pulled the feathers off a quill-pen. Without his noticing it, Elma shot one glance across him at Alfred—a glance that said, half impatiently, half entreatingly, with a soupçon of mutual understanding, “You had better go.”

“I will see if my mother has any letters,” said Alfred with dignity, and went.

As he left the room, Carlos looked at Elma. She had never seen his large blue eyes so sternly disapproving, so severely searching. She looked, in her turn, flushed and inquiringly, at him.

“What is it?” she said after a silence.

“I have no right to question you, Miss Dalziel,” he responded, rather stiffly.

“Who is there that *has* a *right* to question me,” she replied, half haughtily, half sadly. “I have no father—no brother. But you can question me if you will, without the right. I give you the permission.

“Then what day was it that Alfred ‘can never forget?’”

“One day at Ilfracombe. We walked on and lost ourselves away from the rest. It was a day that was not much to me. I did not think then, nor can I believe now, that it was much to him.”

“But evidently it was much to him, if he cannot forget it now that he is my sister’s affianced husband. The words I heard, sounded to me like a treachery to Christine.”

“They did, I own. But if you had heard earlier,

you would have heard they were the first of such words."

"They were the first I heard, I need scarcely say," observed Carlos coldly.

"You need not! I should not suspect *you* of eavesdropping, although you did not scruple to suspect *me* of stealing your sister's lover away behind her back!"

"Had I no cause?" he rejoined, secretly softening and melting rapidly, but for that very reason, looking icier, and seeming sterner than ever.

"Those few unlucky words may have given you some cause, I admit. But does not my explanation satisfy you? Be honest enough to tell me truly whether you believe me," said Elma with a flash of defiant pride lighting up her splendid beauty.

"I could not look at you and doubt you," he replied in a lower voice, coldly still, but now it cost him a hard struggle to keep cool. "When I have left you and am not seeing your face, it may be different."

"What have I done to be doubted?" she said impetuously, her calmness giving way all of a sudden, and tears of wounded feeling springing to her eyes. "What have I done that I should be suspected of such heartless dishonourable meanness as to spread my snares to rob your sister of her lover—to spoil her happiness and his peace to please my vanity! If you believe that of me—I must leave you to believe it! I cannot defend myself!"

"I don't believe it of you!" he said, impetuously, suddenly and utterly vanquished and convinced. There was a tone of suppressed agitation in his voice that was new to it—a new look of eagerness and pain and self-conflict on his face, as he drew a step nearer to her, and his hand clenched upon and crushed and spoilt the papers that lay beneath it on the library-table as he added :

"I beg your pardon if I have been rude and suspicious—I entreat you to forgive me." He paused and stopped himself by main force from saying more ; for other words that must not be uttered were struggling for expression at his vey lips, and it was a hard fight to crush them back down into his heart. Her eyes had darted a magnetic thrill through his every nerve ; the sight of the tears that dimmed and softened their dark brilliance half maddened him now. Yet he restrained himself from saying more than :

"I entreat you to forgive me——"

"I have nothing to forgive," said Elma, a little quiver in her voice, and the dew still trembling on her long eyelashes.

"Well, shake hands then, and the subject's dropped and done with and put away for ever," rejoined Carlos, with a sort of despair in his look and tone, realising that he must wrench himself away from this temptation instantly, before it waxed too strong.

She had a vague intuition of his thoughts ; perhaps she felt the same herself. She gave him her hand for

a minute as she rose up to leave the room, and faintly smiled, with an attempt at calm cordiality.

"We'll say no more of it and think no more of it. And you may trust me," she said, and left him.

"I do. But I can't trust myself!" he muttered, as through the open door he watched her tall, slight figure across the hall.

Elma had only ascended a few steps of the staircase when she encountered Dora tripping down. Coming straight from an interview with Carlos, her head and her heart full of mingled and confused thoughts, but all these thoughts of Carlos, the last person whose presence Elma desired at that moment was Carlos's lawfully and openly affianced bride-elect—especially as Dora glanced at her with inquisitive eyes, and exclaimed:

"Why, Elma! how odd you look! Anything the matter?"

"Nothing; what should be the matter?" said Elma, composing her features into an orthodox cheerfulness.

"What have you been doing this morning?" pursued Dora.

"Reading in the library."

"Where is Carlos, do you know?"

"In the library; he came in a few minutes ago."

"Oh," said Dora, not looking pleased, and ran downstairs to the library immediately.

Her lover was standing by the table with a clouded face.

"What have you been doing, you idle boy!" said

Dora playfully but sharply. "Not writing letters, I see? not reading?"

"Yawning—and thinking."

"Thinking—what about?" she inquired, looking up at him, ready at a word to be petulant, ready at a word to be flattered.

"Why, you, of course," replied Carlos, truthfully enough as to the words, for he had certainly been thinking of her, but not quite truthfully as to the spirit. He smiled as he spoke, and smoothed her curling hair with a dutiful caress; but the smile and the caress were alike soulless, given with lips and fingers merely.

"Me! More likely Elma," responded Dora, half in fun as an experiment, half suspicious.

"Do not talk nonsense, Dora!" said her lover with unusual sharpness, a little vexed with her, but bitterly wroth with himself.

Dora flushed angrily, and jerked her curls away from his hand.

"Do not you be rude!" she retorted. "Things have come to a pretty pass if I may not mention her Ladyship's name without your forgetting yourself in this way! What is *she*, pray, that her very name is to be kept so sacred that I mayn't even chaff about her?"

"Dora, what *have* you taken into your head?" he said helplessly, distressed to know what to do or say, and feeling himself too guilty to be resentful or offended. Then he unluckily added, "You should

not be so silly, Dora. Miss Dalziel is nothing to me."

"I think our interview had better not continue now, Carlos," said Dora, drawing herself up with an air intended to be grand and proud. "When you can speak to me without these perpetual rebukes, and when you can speak the *truth*, we may talk again."

"If you think I don't speak the truth, our interview had certainly better not continue until you have changed your mind."

Dora had not intended to be taken at her word ; but, being so taken, she tossed her head and swept out of the room. She did not answer because she could not ; she was annoyed, hurt, and angry, and on the verge of a burst of tears. But tears would look like melting, and she would not cry before Carlos, lest he should think it meant repentance ; and besides it was helpless and undignified and unbecoming. So the tears which would have melted Carlos's heart and brought him to her feet at once, she fled to hide from him ; and he, who was not studying her face very intently, did not observe the symptoms of an impending shower, and stood in the library, feeling himself injured, while Dora was sobbing in her own room.

Elma also had fled straight to her room, locked the door, and indulged in a long fit of crying. Not exactly knowing why, she knelt by the bedside, burying her face, and sobbed and drenched the counterpane with tears.

Both the girls sponged away the unbecoming and tell-tale traces of tears with cold water ; but both appeared at luncheon with slightly reddened eyes all the same.

More than one person silently observed this fact ; and the little cloud on the horizon began to spread wider. Geoffrey was not well enough to come down to lunch that day, and altogether the meal was not so merry a one as usual.

Alfred sought and found an opportunity of saying aside to Elma in the evening when they assembled in the drawing-room :

" You look as if you had been disturbed somehow to-day. I trust Carlos has said nothing to annoy you ? I will not allow him to vex you."

" *He* has *never* said anything to annoy me !" replied Elma impulsively, with an imprudent emphasis.

" He is fortunate," commented Alfred with sudden stiffness and suspicion, and turned away from Elma towards Christine. Christine's eyes had been following him with a timid watchfulness, a faint dawn of uneasiness ; but she met him with her usual gentle smile. Dora did not bestow any smiles on Carlos ; she wore an injured and martyred air, and left it to him to seek a private and demonstrative reconciliation, for which he had, however, no mind ; he desired no further allusion to the morning's " tiff," and was only anxious that it should be forgotten. He too had a hidden wolf-cub biting at his heart to carry now—a mad and

hopeless passion for Elma Dalziel gnawing unseen and unconfessed. He knew now that Elma would have been to him what Dora never could be. Dora's beauty had never done more than please his senses ; Elma's stirred his soul. Dora's love had flattered and gratified him, and their boy-and-girl attachment had been bright and shallow. The mere hopeless dream of Elma's love had made him a man, and struck at once to depths of passion hitherto unknown to him. He knew it at last, although even until that very morning he had tried to believe and to assure himself that such a passion was impossible. Now his eyes were opened to the truth. When he had thought she was alluring and encouraging Alfred, he had hated her passionately for the moment ; when he saw tears in her eyes he had longed to catch her in his arms and kiss them away.

That one minute of jealousy and suspicion—then that one glimpse of her beautiful reproachful resentful eyes flashing through tears, had been enough ; had torn off the veils and bonds under which he had confined and concealed even from his own eyes the growing love. It had suddenly waxed to a giant, and burst through all concealments, all restraints, to its full power in his heart. He knew this ; but no one else should know it, he swore to himself. The bonds of honour, and of old familiar calm affection, chained him irrevocably to Dora. Nothing should shake his loyalty to her in look or word or deed, although in thought he

knew himself now disloyal, and hated himself for being involuntarily guilty of what in all the world he most despised—a breach of faith.

It was night, and Carlos was sitting staring at the fire in his own room, with no inclination to go to bed, no thought of sleep, when some one tapped gently at his door.

“Come in,” he said, waking up out of his reverie, and Ina Atherdale entered.

“Geoffrey is so restless and feverish to-night,” she said, “I am very, very anxious about him, Carlos.”

She looked anxious and pale, and shivered a little as she spoke, although she was wrapped in a warm blue quilted robe.

“I’m sorry. Shall I come?” asked Carlos.

“He has asked for you. Are you tired? could you sit up a little, dear boy?”

“All night if you like,” he said readily.

“He will not let *me* sit up and watch him; he wants you, and no one but you. I will have a doctor to-morrow, whether he wishes it or not. I am sure he is very ill. But to-night will you come to him and sit by him?”

Carlos, glad to have some occupation to distract his thoughts, followed Ina to Geoffrey’s room, and took his seat by the bedside. Ina would have sat down upon a sofa near, but Geoffrey interfered.

“Ina, go away and lie down!” he said.

“Indeed I am not tired, Geoffrey dear. I could not sleep! Let me stay!” she pleaded.

"No—no ! Leave Carlos with me. Go away and rest."

She came gently to his side, and laid her cool soft hand upon his feverish burning brow.

"I will go if you wish it," she whispered tenderly. "But indeed I am not tired." She hesitated, and looked appealingly for a permission to stay, but Geoffrey was obdurate.

"Go," he said with a trace of irritability and pain, "I wish it." As she left him however he took her hand in both his and kissed it lingeringly, but sent her from him resolutely nevertheless.

"Don't be anxious ; rest quiet," said Carlos, aside, as he opened the door for Ina to pass. "I reckon it's only a little feverish nervousness. He'll most likely be all right in the morning."

Then he went back and sat quietly and watchfully by his uncle's side. Geoffrey was restless, but silent. Once he said,

"Carlos, if I talk wild, let no one come. Keep Ina out. And forget any mad thing I may say as soon as I have said it."

"All right," agreed Carlos, with sufficient strength of reassurance in those two syllables to content Geoffrey, who said no more.

Sitting there in the silence of night, Carlos's thoughts went naturally back to his own painful and unsatisfactory position, his own firm resolve to act up to his own standard of duty. He must, he would,

conceal, combat, and conquer the love which had uninvited taken possession of his soul. To conceal it cost a constant struggle ; to combat against it was a still harder strife ; to conquer it—that seemed impossible ! Worst of all to bear was the feeling of self-reproach and stern self-disapproval. What right had *he*, he thought, to blame Alfred for feeling the very influence to which he himself had succumbed ? What right had he to despise a weakness—to resent a faithlessness, of both of which he was himself equally guilty ? Natural self-love suggested to him various excuses for his own shortcoming ; brotherly championship inclined him to resent any disloyalty in his sister's lover. But the innate justice of his nature compelled him to admit that Alfred was neither more nor less in fault than himself, that they had both alike yielded to a temptation which both had believed they could well withstand, and that both were wandering in heart, if not in appearance, from the women to whom they had pledged their love. And all for a pair of large brown eyes and a bright expressive smile ! However ponderings on the causes that brought on a trouble were not much in Carlos's line ; his thoughts dwelt rather upon the means of removing it. The accident had happened, and it had got to be repaired. He had fallen under the spell of a love that was disloyalty. Well, he must escape from the spell and cure himself ! Alfred too had got caught in the same pit-fall. And Alfred too must struggle out of it, must

free himself from Elma's fascination for Christine's sake.

The night was wearing on ; the candle was burning low, and the fire had sunk together in a smouldering heap. There were no more flickering shadows cast about the room by the crackling flames ; the ashes now and then dropped dead through the bars of the fire-place, and the faint grating sound of their dropping was the only thing that broke the stillness. Geoffrey had fallen into an uneasy sleep—a sleep that presently became disturbed by feverish dreams.

He began to moan and mutter to himself, and in the silence every broken syllable or sigh came distinct to the listener's ear. He distinguished among Geoffrey's fevered murmurs, the words,

“ Your sin has found you out ! ” over and over again reiterated ; “ Your sin has found you out.” Then after a minute's silence, Geoffrey glanced up with open eyes, but not looking at Carlos, and said suddenly :

“ Who says it has found me out ? ” and then sighed bitterly, “ Never—never absent from me ! never in all my life ! ”

“ You shall never know,” he began then murmuring presently. “ Don't fear, love—never ! you shall never know it in this world. Too pure—too pure and good. I had no right. Am I unkind ? it's for your sake. Cruel only to be kind—Ina—for your sake.”

Carlos, keeping his faithful watch, observed the room door open a few inches, gently, noiselessly, and the

candle-light gleamed on a white hand and a blue sleeve. Geoffrey did not see it ; he went on tossing and muttering :

“ Your sin has found you out. Never—never.”

The door opened an inch wider, and Ina looked in with mute inquiry. Carlos rose, and crossed the room to speak to her.

“ He is no worse. But you had better not come in. I think your presence agitates him.”

“ Who is there ? ” demanded Geoffrey suspiciously.

“ It is only I, dear. May I come in ? ”

“ Was it you said it ? ” he asked with a sort of wild bewilderment ; “ did *you* say it had found me out ? ”

“ No, dear, I did not say so.”

She went to Geoffrey's side, and smoothed his pillow anxiously and tenderly. He looked at her strangely, and glanced about the room ; then a mist seemed gradually to clear away from his senses.

“ I have been dreaming, Ina,” he said. Have you been here long ? ”

“ Only a minute.”

“ You must not stay. I'd love to have you, but you torture me.”

“ Do I, Geoffrey ? ” she murmured, wondering and distressed, but gently as a kiss.

“ I'm ill ; that's it,” he said, caressing her hand. “ When I'm well, it's different. But leave me now—else the ghosts will come to you too.”

Very sadly and lingeringly Ina glided out of the room. She beckoned Carlos to the door :

"I am here close by," she whispered. "Promise to call me if he is worse ! and to-morrow we will have Doctor Haynes here first thing."

"Yes, I guess we had better," agreed Carlos thoughtfully. "But now you go and rest as he wishes. Trust me to call you if you're wanted."

Carlos kept his vigil by Geoffrey until morning, and listened until morning to half-articulate murmurings and moans. The suspicion dawned on him that night, and grew almost to certainty before the day, that some secret regret or remorse was locked in Geoffrey's heart, and preying on his very life.





## CHAPTER XVI.

### TRUSTED.

Comfort her, comfort her, all things good !—  
Let me and my passionate love go by,  
But speak to her all things holy and high  
Whatever happen to me !  
—Me and my harmful love go by,  
But come to her waking, find her asleep,  
Powers of the height, powers of the deep,  
And comfort her though I die !—*Tennyson.*

**T**HE next morning at breakfast none of the Atherdales wore very bright countenances. Ina was pale, absent, and anxious. Carlos had a shade of unusual thoughtfulness in his look. Dora's manner to her betrothed had "got the chill off," but was no more than lukewarm still. Between Carlos and Alfred was a cold reserve, which neither of them seemed inclined to break through. Alfred was ceremoniously polite to Elma, and had restored his undivided attention to Christine.

Immediately after breakfast Carlos went out, to walk down to the village and fetch Dr. Haynes.

The rest of the party dispersed themselves about the various rooms according to taste.

"Where are you going, Elma?" asked Christine.

"Oh, to the library, I suppose!" interposed Dora, with a marked significance in her voice. "Elma is very fond of the library, though to be sure there could be only *half* an attraction there this morning!"

"I am going to my room," replied Elma briefly, with head erect, scornfully ignoring the taunt.

Ina Atherdale heard this little passage and wondered what it meant. She was enlightened before very long. Her sister-in-law came to make sympathetic confidential inquiries about Geoffrey, and having uttered an ample amount of anxiety and condolence, lingered, hesitated, and then suggested in a honeyed manner :

"By the bye, Ina my dear, I wish you would just drop a hint—a gentle hint—to Elma. Her manners are very charming—perhaps a trifle too charming. Dora seems to think that she does not quite appreciate the peculiar position of Alfred and Carlos, both being engaged. Dear Elma is accustomed to flirt with everything in the shape of a man, I know; and perhaps she does not quite realise the difference of their position from that of ordinary young men who have no especial claim on their attention."

"I am very sorry if Elma has unintentionally caused any little embarrassment. I am sure she would not willingly do so. But I will speak to her," said Ina.

"Do, dear—just a word in season. Both those

boys were in and out of the library yesterday all the time she was there, I hear ; and it is quite natural that Dora should not altogether like it. Besides there are dear Christine's feelings to be considered."

Ina promised to use her best influence for the safety of the endangered feelings. Accordingly, when a few minutes after Mrs. Atherdale had departed, Elma entered her sister's boudoir, Ina availed herself of the opportunity.

"You are a little pale, Elma dear. Are you quite well?"

"Yes, quite. Why are you looking at me and hesitating? Have you got anything to say to me, Ina?" asked the girl, her quick, subtle, discerning instinct at work.

"I have something to say—a mere nothing—only a word of suggestion which I am sure is not really needed. My darling Elma, you know—you must know—that you are gifted with great attractions. Do not let your beauty work mischief, dear, nor yield to the temptation of little coquetries that may cause distress to other people."

"I understand of course," replied Elma, flushing crimson. "To which of them am I suspected of causing distress, Dora or Christine?"

"Neither in particular," answered Ina, hesitating a little.

"But both in general?" said Elma, smiling, yet looking deeply perturbed and annoyed. "Well, who

is it has reported this danger to you? Dora, I suppose?"

"No."

"Not Christine?"

"No."

"Mrs. Atherdale then? Yes? Well, I thank her. And do you believe, Ina, that I have been interfering with their privileges and disturbing their happiness?"

"Not intentionally, I am sure."

"Oh, not intentionally? I am glad, Ina, you do me that justice," she said, with a softening of sisterly affection in her voice. "But as it is clear that I have been in the way," she nearly broke down, and suddenly paused to steady and clear her voice. Rosy with the flush of rebellion against suspicion—a flush which always mantled readily enough in her cheeks—drawn to her full height, her graceful head erect, her hands clasped resolutely, she might have stood for an artist's model—an ideal of a wronged or insulted queen, in the flower of youth and beauty—while she silently seemed to gather up her strength and resolve for something she had to say. While she still so paused and stood—while her sister looking at her said to herself, "She is very beautiful; it is no wonder if she does turn those boys' heads"—there came a tap at the door, and a servant announced that Dr. Haynes had arrived.

Ina instantly hastened to meet the doctor, and Elma as hastily retreated to her own room. There she

walked up and down with stormy haste and perturbation for a few minutes ; and then opened the wardrobe like a hurricane, and began pulling out her dresses, which she tempestuously shook and spread and folded, and on which, to say the truth, a few tears fell. She did not devote herself very diligently to her task, but so vehemently as to exemplify the adage of " Most haste, worse speed ! " She kept stopping in shaking out a mantle, or forgetting the folding of a skirt, to wipe away a tear very angrily, with a subdued sob as much of vexation with herself as of distress. She had arranged quite a heap of apparel, preparatory for packing, when her sister came in to her room.

" What are you doing, darling ? " asked Ina, with some surprise, but in a sad and subdued way.

" Getting ready to pack up, Ina, dear. I must not—I cannot—remain here if my presence causes any inconvenience. And it evidently does ! I feel I am in the way. I will go back to Aunt Priscilla's."

" Do not talk in that way, Elma. You will make me more unhappy—and I am unhappy enough."

" What is it, Ina, darling ? Is Geoffrey worse ? " asked Elma, forgetting her own little trouble, and flinging her arms fondly round her sister.

" He is very ill, dear ; he is worse to-day. Dr. Haynes looks as if he thought it a serious case, and says he wishes he had been sent for before. I wish he had. I would have sent days ago, only Geoffrey would not let me. I am very, very anxious, Elma ;

and you must not dream of leaving me. I want you with me. If I said anything to hurt you, dear, forgive it, and say no more about going away."

Elma kissed her silently, and never uttered another word suggestive of leaving Saxby Towers.

"He has never been right since that Sunday afternoon we walked to the church-yard," observed Ina sadly.

"Very likely he caught a chill that day on the damp grass, and it has settled upon him," conjectured Elma.

"I think so; and also it seems to me that the mental effect of that day has never worn off him. He has such strange ways now."

"Natural invalid's whims; don't be anxious about that," said Elma comfortingly.

Geoffrey was indeed now seriously ill. He was not an easy patient to manage; he was irritably reluctant to answer questions upon his symptoms; and was only with the greatest difficulty persuaded to take the requisite medicines, in which he announced his utter disbelief, and which he insisted, if he took them at all, he would pour out and administer to himself. He received the doctor scrupulously as a friend, and seemed to regard every attempt at professional inquiries and directions, as intrusive and unnecessary. The whims and vagaries that had been slightly perceptible in his everyday life came out conspicuously in his illness. But he was almost always gentle and

tender to Ina, although he frequently banished her for hours from his room, and kept Carlos with him. Carlos watched by him untiringly all the hours of the night, and often many hours of the day. Sometimes Geoffrey talked wandringly at night, but Carlos was then always keeping faithful vigil, and no other ear ever heard what strange wild mutterings passed Geoffrey's lips.

When Dr. Haynes came, he never said "better;" he had looked grave at first, and looked still graver afterwards.

Day by day, and hour by hour, the shadow of anxiety and presentiment spread wider, darker, sank closer over all the house, and reflected a deeper pain and dread in Ina's earnest loving eyes. At all hours of the day and night now, the door of Geoffrey's room was quietly besieged by softly-stepping, low-voiced inquirers. Alfred Atherdale seldom let two hours go by without a personal visit of inquiry. His mother was as constant in her attention; both mother and son would gladly have been "of more use" as they often said, and spent more care and time on Geoffrey. But many nurses were not needed in the day; and Geoffrey would allow no one but Carlos to sit up with him at night. And no one but Elma was troubled lest Carlos should overtax his strength; she alone watched his face with an anxiety, the stronger because it was so secret, lest he should fail under the fatigue of constant watching. But Carlos was

young and strong, and fatigue affected him but little.

There came a night when every one knew, what no one openly admitted, that the end of all watching and anxiety was inevitably near, though probably still days distant, but coming, slowly and surely. All the family felt this, and one after the other had been to inquire. Ina, banished as usual, had sunk into an uneasy sleep, when Alfred wakeful and anxious, came softly along the corridor, and knocked gently as usual at the door of Geoffrey's room. Carlos crossed the floor, and opened the door noiselessly.

"No worse, but no better, I'm afraid," he whispered.

"Asleep?" inquired Alfred.

"I think so," replied Carlos rather briefly, standing with the door in his hand, and not inviting his cousin to enter. Alfred looked in over Carlos's shoulder searchingly and curiously. He saw a small desk lying open on Geoffrey's bed—a square rosewood desk, which he knew as his uncle's favourite receptacle for private papers, and which was always kept locked. He recognised this, and saw that it was open. But he made no remark, and asked no further question of Carlos. He made some commonplace observation, and withdrew, suspicious, angry, and downcast. He liked his uncle well enough, and felt a decorous regret for his illness with the upper strata of his feelings; but in the depths of his heart he had only one anxiety. What disposal of Saxby Towers had Geoffrey made in

his will? It was wholly in Geoffrey's power; the fee-simple of the estate was his; his only male relatives were his two brother's sons. Carlos was the son of the younger brother; but Carlos was certainly his uncle's favourite. Then on the other side Alfred, besides being an elder brother's son, was the elder in years, and in his own mind by far the best suited by nature and education to take command of such an establishment as Saxby Towers. The glimpse of the open desk dwelt in his mind; he could not sleep. At dawn he rose again, and glided a second time to his uncle's door. He did not knock, but tried the handle cautiously. Was it locked? No. No one ever thought of opening it without permission; so it was simply latched. The door that led to the dressing-room, and through that to Ina's little boudoir, was bolted that night; but Alfred did not know this, nor care about it. The door on which his hand rested was not secured; that was all he knew, and of that he took advantage.

He opened the door a few inches, dexterously and noiselessly. He saw Carlos bending over his uncle with a folded paper in his hand—a small squarely folded blue paper sealed with red wax, it seemed in that hasty glimpse, and a candle stood close by, as if it had been used for sealing. Alfred was not observed by either Geoffrey or Carlos; but lest any sound in the closing of the door should betray him, and also to preserve an honest face to his own conscience, and

keep up the fiction of anxiety for Geoffrey—he did not steal away as quietly as he had come. No ! he first pulled the door to, softly as velvet, and then knocked straightforwardly and clearly. In a minute or two Carlos came again to open the door ; and this time there was neither desk upon the bed nor paper in Carlos's hand ; but the desk, Alfred noticed, stood back, closed, on a table.

“ How is he ? ”

“ Feverish. Suffering a good deal, I fear. ”

“ I wish I might relieve you of your watch, Carlos ; can I not be of any use ? ”

“ Thanks, no, ” replied Carlos, more heartily, “ he's accustomed to have me about him. ”

Alfred entreated that he might be summoned whenever he could be of the slightest service, and so retired, not pressing to be allowed to enter the room ; he had seen enough to set his thoughts busily at work.

The dawning day grew brighter, but brought no gleam of sunshine to lighten the anxiety of those who loved Geoffrey Atherdale. It was clear, as the morning wore on, that there was a decided change for the worse in his state. Dr. Haynes came, and looked at him seriously, and put a very few inquiries, and then, in leaving, beckoned Carlos out of the room.

It was only a question of days—a day more or less, he said ; he should come that night ; but he feared he could do no good. It might be satisfactory to have a consultation ; the family physician might be telegraphed

for ; but in Dr. Haynes's own opinion there was no hope. If another physician was to be summoned, it had better be done soon.

"You had better prepare his wife gently," were Dr. Haynes's parting words.

Carlos returned to the invalid's room. But when he looked in Ina's face, he saw that there was no "gentle preparation" needed. She stood by the bedside supporting Geoffrey's head on her arm, and her eyes turned from him for a moment to Carlos, and told him in that one glance of despairing sadness, so solemn and awe-stricken as to be almost calm, how surely she knew that the end of their watching was drawing near. Carlos could only lay his hand on her shoulder silently, with a world of unuttered sympathy and strengthening in his touch.

When he could draw her aside, he told her Dr. Haynes's suggestion relative to telegraphing for their London physician ; and Ina fled from the room instantly to send a messenger.

"What is it?" asked Geoffrey, faintly and painfully, for speaking was an exertion to him now.

Carlos explained that they wished to have the opinion of another doctor.

"What use?" muttered Geoffrey. "The end's the same. Carlos—boy—come here ! What *you* think of me—I can't help—but what *she* thinks of me—I've left that to you. In my grave—I could not rest—unless I knew——"

"That your desire was carried out," said Carlos as he paused for breath. "It shall be so, dear Uncle Geoff. Trust me."

A look of affection faintly lit up Geoffrey's hollow eyes as he laid his hand in his nephew's.

"Like your father," he whispered. "True at heart."

Presently he signed to Carlos to hand him a phial containing some narcotic drops which had been prescribed to give him temporary ease and rest. He poured out a few of these and swallowed them.

"Maybe they will stop this pain," he whispered, and closed his eyes as if to try and sleep. But the feverish restlessness was slow to yield to any soothing influence. "When the sea gives up its dead," he murmured. "All secrets—shall be known—then."

And that was the burthen of his low, scarcely audible mutterings, "the sea shall give up its dead," and "the secrets shall be known," often and disjointedly reiterated, until at last a few minutes—a very few—of an uneasy sleep stole softly on, and quieted him.

All day Carlos and Ina attended him with ceaseless silent devotion. All day the rest of the family hovered round the room with grave and sorrowful faces and hushed whispers of inquiry. All day the consciousness that the closing hour was near sank deeper and surer into the hearts of the two who watched him. He never sent Ina from him that day; he let her stay beside him, and seemed even easier when he held her

hand. He spoke but little, and though he murmured inaudibly to himself now and then, his mind wandered no more. And so the slow hours wore away, and no physician arrived from London; and when Dr. Haynes came, he could do nothing but assure them that he would return first thing in the morning, but that he did not consider himself justified in holding out any hope.

The evening had deepened into night; the busy crackling fire was the only bright or cheerful thing in the room where Carlos and Ina watched over Geoffrey.

"Are you in much pain, dear?" she whispered tenderly, noticing his worn and suffering look with a stifled sigh.

"Yes," he said. "But it will not last long. When I have left you—" he broke off gaspingly for a moment, and then added; "Carlos! you'll look after her? I trust you, Carlos—in all things, all things."

"I will look after her," said Carlos steadily and earnestly, promising and assuring more by his manner than his mere words implied.

"So the end has come," whispered Geoffrey half to himself. "The end—and never the courage, never. A coward I have lived—and—a coward I shall die! But this last cowardice is the cowardice of love. I dare not—" he said no more.

"Geoffrey? What is it you say, my brave true Geoffrey?" said Ina, with a thrill of adoring love and passionate sorrow in her low-whispered words.

"Nothing—nothing, Ina. Faithful—pure—trusting wife! May be—another world may give you to me still."

The next time he spoke it was to insist that there was no use in *two* watching all night, and that one of them should lie on the sofa. There was no crossing Geoffrey's will, and less than ever now. Ina would not stir from his pillow; so Carlos threw himself carelessly on the sofa, intending to keep awake, and not thinking for a moment of the possibility of sleep. But in the dead of night, and in an almost utter silence, sleep carries the citadel which is never dreaming of its assault and has no defence ready. Carlos was more exhausted than he thought, by many nights of vigil and sleepless busy anxious days. On him had fallen the greatest responsibilities and all the serious fatigues of those weary nights and days. He was utterly worn out with constant watching; and in spite of his knowledge of the danger of Geoffrey's condition, and his implicit belief that sleep was impossible, sleep stole on him nevertheless.

Ina kept vigil alone, and watched, with anguish deeper than his own, the lines of suffering on Geoffrey's brow, and held cooling drinks ready to refresh his feverish lips, and bent her ear to catch any faint word he whispered. She heard him sometimes murmur:

"Another world—In another world, Ina," as the weary dreadful night dragged slowly on.

He asked presently for "some grapes." Ina saw

the plate that had held the purple hothouse grapes was empty, but she knew there were some in the dining-room. She looked at Carlos, and saw that he slept, and remembered how many nights he had watched without even an hour's sleep, and resolved to fetch them herself. Whispering to Geoffrey that she would not be long, she stole velvet-footed out of the room and down the stairs. Her candle went out in the dining-room, and she had to grope to the sideboard for matches. Nervous, cold, and trembling as she was, it took her some little time to strike a match and open the cupboard and find the grapes.

"You have been long," murmured Geoffrey, when she returned with them. He seemed to have forgotten what he had asked for, and only tasted one grape, and lay back drowsily.

"I have taken some more drops," he whispered. "Ina, sit by me while I sleep!" His eyes were closed, and a calmer look seemed gradually coming over his face. He lay still without a moan or a murmur, and soon Ina knew he slept.

She leant her head softly against the heaped-up pillows, and waited and watched. She was dizzy, cold, and faint with anxiety and grief; her heart was beating in slow muffled throbs; she felt as though she were dying herself. The dreadful inaction of sitting still in the silence oppressed her; yet she seemed not to have the strength ever to move again. While she had anything to do for him, any word to say to him,

any errand to run for him, she had felt somehow occupied. Even watching him awake, and answering every look or whisper of his, was an occupation that kept her from sinking. But there was nothing to do or say now; only the stillness, that seemed to her more ghastly and foreboding than any sight or sound, to endure. She sat still with a desperate patience, motionless as a statue, with despairing anguish in her face, cold at heart, and cold to the tips of her fingers, dreading the morning, because God only knew what the morning would bring, yet feeling the shadows and silence of the night almost unbearable. She did not know how the time passed, only that Geoffrey slept, and she was watching by him.

Some trifling noise, startlingly distinct in the stillness—a falling cinder from the fire, or a mouse behind the wainscot—awoke Carlos suddenly. He rose up with a start, but quietly as an Indian in ambush, and hastened to Ina's side.

"He is asleep," whispered Ina.

"That's well. Have I slept long? I did not mean to sleep," whispered Carlos back.

Together they waited, and still Geoffrey slept, and the cold light of dawn crept into the room.

At broad daylight a gentle tap came at the door, and Christine's fair, anxious face peeped in, and whispered, "How is he?"

"Asleep," was the answer; and the same answer awaited Mrs. Atherdale when she too came to inquire.

"He has had quite a long sleep. It is time for him to take the draught. Ought we to wake him, do you think?" asked Ina of Carlos.

"I guess not. He's had no sleep till this, you know. Half an hour later or earlier for the draught can't matter much. You've given him the drops, I see," observed Carlos, looking at the phial of narcotic mixture.

"I did not give it him; he took it while I went to fetch the grapes. My candle went out, and I was some time gone," she said absently, watching Geoffrey.

"He's taken a good deal. Why! the phial was full up to here when I saw it last," remarked Carlos.

Ina bent over Geoffrey, and laid her hand softly upon his.

"He is sleeping heavily," she said, "but I do not think he is quite so feverish. His hands do not burn as they did."

They waited a little longer, and then Carlos said reflectively:

"I don't know about waking him. Maybe this sound sleep is a good sign, but I'm not sure."

Ina looked alarmed instantly. She pushed back the fair curling hair caressingly from Geoffrey's brow, with fingers that trembled; and her voice shook as she bent close to him and whispered his name. He did not wake.

"Geoffrey—Geoffrey dear!" she said more earnestly, and in a tone more quivering.

"Don't get frightened," said Carlos re-assuringly.

"We're not bound to wake him yet."

"But—why does he not wake?" she whispered wildly. "He always does when I call his name."

Carlos caught a reflection of her anxiety. He too bent close to Geoffrey and called him softly at first, then louder.

No answer; no sign of waking; no disturbance in the calm deep-breathing sleep.

Carlos put his arm under the sleeper and raised him to his shoulder. Still no waking; and Ina clung to Carlos, quite breathless, in an agony of terror and suspense.

"Why, why does he not wake?" she gasped.

A faint sound of carriage-wheels grinding on the gravel—then the tinkle of a bell in the hall, came up to their ears. In a few moments a servant knocked at the door and announced that—

"Dr. Wilton had just arrived from London."

"Send him here! Ask him to come here instantly!" cried Ina.

The doctor came.

"He is sleeping so soundly; we cannot wake him," explained Carlos to him, as Ina's voice trembled so uncontrollably now that she could not explain.

The doctor looked, listened, made one or two inquiries, and felt Geoffrey's pulse gravely.

"He must be roused at once," he said abruptly and earnestly, "or it will be too late."

But it was too late even then. In vain they called upon him and strove to awaken him. Even as Ina clasped him in her arms, and cried to him to rouse himself "for her sake," the pulse's beat grew feebler—the breathing failed—and ceased.

He never heard her wild, pathetic calling on his name; he never met the passionate appeal of her eyes; he never knew the desperate throbbing of her heart whereon his passive head rested unconsciously.

Without a sign or syllable of farewell, without a parting look or sigh, he passed away

"Into the land of the great Departed;  
Into the Silent Land."





## CHAPTER XVII.

### SANS PEUR ET SANS REPROCHE.

Alas ! how easily things go wrong !  
A sigh too much or a kiss too long,  
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,  
And things are never the same again.

—*Macdonald.*

**T** was on the funeral day that Geoffrey Atherdale's will was read. His sister-in-law would have deemed it indecorous haste for that document to be opened before, although it had been found first thing, ready to hand, not in the locked, brass-bound rosewood desk, but in a tall old-fashioned bureau of many pigeon holes, where indeed Geoffrey once had mentioned to his wife that it was kept. The doctors had made a great many minute inquiries as to the last night of Geoffrey's life, the time at which he drank that last narcotic draught, the circumstances under which he had taken it, and the various symptoms from which he had suffered. All their questions having been answered, they had con-

sulted together, compared notes, and finally given a proper formal certificate as to his death.

Dr Wilton was compelled to return to London ; but Dr. Haynes attended the funeral, and came back to Saxby Towers to hear the reading of the will. The doctor, the clergyman, the family lawyer, Alfred, and Carlos, assembled in the library for that purpose.

Ina, prostrated by a sleepless night of weeping, was lying down in her room, tenderly watched over by Elma. Mrs. Edwin Atherdale decided that as a mark of respect and sympathy for Ina, she also would remain apart from the library assembly, in deference to Ina's absence. The clergyman's wife had kindly invited the two little girls to stay with her during the sad days at Saxby Towers, so only Dora and Christine were sitting with Mrs. Atherdale awaiting the news.

Mrs. Atherdale had shed many tears of true regret for Geoffrey's death, and sympathised as truly with Ina's sorrow. She was not intensely anxious to know the tenor of Geoffrey's will, although of course she felt a strong curiosity on the subject. Some one or other of her family would almost surely be considered therein, she believed ; and she also put faith in the probability that one of her children would one day rule over Saxby Towers, Alfred by possession, or Dora by marriage. To Mrs. Atherdale the question thus might not be one of vital importance ; but to Alfred it was, or he deemed it so.

It was he whose step was the first to sound in the

corridor leading to his mother's room. They knew he brought the news of Geoffrey's disposal of his property. Mrs. Atherdale would have thought it wanting in decorum to hasten to meet him ; but Dora did not feel that scruple, and ran to the door.

Alfred looked very white, and there was a hard and bitter expression on his handsome pale face as he said :

"Carlos is master of this place now. We are his guests !"

A cloud came over his mother's face in sympathy with her son's evident chagrin. But she hesitated to utter any disappointment ; and she saw Dora's eyes brightening with satisfaction.

In Geoffrey's will Alfred was not forgotten, nor indeed were any of the family, save the two children, without some legacy. Ina of course was left well provided for ; but Saxby Towers, with all the remainder of the property, was bequeathed to Carlos solely. Bitterness was in Alfred's heart ; but nobody else was discontented, and Dora was well satisfied.

Carlos meanwhile went to Ina's boudoir, and there found Elma sitting by Ina's side. More beautiful than ever in her mourning dress and her grave womanly tenderness, Elma cared for her pale and prostrate sister as a mother watches over her child. Carlos had never seen her so gentle, so tender and subdued, as now, when her great dark eyes dwelt lovingly and anxiously on Ina's face, as she hovered round her with noiseless

movements and soft caressing hands. And from this quiet group of sorrow and love and sympathy, he went out to meet Dora, who greeted him with an eager smile.

"And so this place is all yours, Carlos? Ours, that is, it will be! I'm so glad."

"Well, I'm glad you are glad, Dora dear. But I don't feel well able to rejoice myself just yet."

"Alfred does not rejoice by-the-bye, I can tell you," remarked Dora, "he looks as black as thunder. He thinks we oughtn't all to be staying on here; but I say it's jolly. I don't want to go away."

"Dora, if there's one thing that would hurt and anger me, it would be any talk of your going away, and leaving me here in what would be such a dismal solitude."

"It would be rather dismal here without us, all alone!" agreed Dora sincerely. "You would miss us, wouldn't you?" smiling at him sweetly.

"I would indeed," he replied, and truly enough. But he did not add what was equally true, that there was another presence in the house which he would miss even more.

The next day Carlos was in the library, when, to his surprise and gratification, Elma came in and observed that she had been looking for him.

"Ina wants to speak to you," she said in a gentle self-possessed business-like way, "and I am come as an avant-courier. She wants to talk to you about our

leaving here this week ; we think of going to London."

"Is this place painful to Ina then? is she very anxious to get back to London?"

"Not exactly ; but we think it would be as well."

"Well, I'll escort her to London, or anywhere else, whenever she wishes."

"But indeed you need not ; there is no escort needed."

"Do you know that Uncle Geoff's wish was that I should look after her? Do you think I'd let her go travelling up to London, all sad and lonely, and I lounging about here?"

"I shall be with her, and look after her well," said Elma.

"You? An efficient protector! And who's to look after you then?"

"Oh, I don't need looking after?"

"Well, just tell me the day she wants to be in London, and I'll be ready to see you up."

"That is quite impossible ; you must not think of such a thing. How could you leave your other guests, you know?"

Carlos looked "posed" for a minute, as he reflected upon Dora's probable opinion on the subject. Elma took advantage of her victory, and continued :

"We shall go on Friday or Saturday, I think."

"I don't quite understand her wishing to leave here so soon," he said. "I'd have thought she would have

clung to this place. People can't comprehend each other's feelings of course; but I didn't fancy she would have been in a hurry to get away."

"It is not that she is in any hurry to leave here. It is only that we think we had better go."

"Why better? It can't be that you put me to the pain of feeling that you don't wish to stay here now the place is mine? She can't have such an idea in her head. Miss Dalziel, is it *you* who wish to take your sister away?"

Elma looked down as she met his eyes; they were unconsciously saying more than his words.

"I do not wish to take her away; though I do wish to go myself," she admitted imprudently; and then, dismayed at what she had said, coloured scarlet, and stood covered with utter confusion, and suffused with the bright blush that was so ever ready to mantle in her cheeks. There was a silence; then,

"I beg your pardon—I—I'm afraid I was rude," she faltered apologetically.

"No. You were not rude," said Carlos quietly. "I see. You don't want to be my guest. You are quite right."

"I did not intend any slight. I have not offended you? You do not mind my wishing to leave here?"

"No. It is better you should go—before I become a traitor as well as a fool!"

"You *could not* be a traitor! I defy you to commit a treachery!" said Elma, the words bursting im-

petuously from her heart to her lips, and a splendid smile of pride and faith in him lighting up her face.

"That's well said ! You give me strength !" replied he, with as splendid a flash of passion and resolution in his blue eyes. "But it's hard to think," he added, "that I met you again too late. If only I had known you, as I know you now, earlier ! or never known you at all !"

"*Ifs* are useless—*ifs* are sad," she rejoined almost impatiently. "We *have* met ; and we must part."

They stood face to face, young, beautiful, of ardent natures both, drawn together by the magnetic force of Love, held apart by the impassable barrier of Honour. Their eyes flashed electric thrills into each other's souls ; their resolute wills kept them inexorably apart, touching not a hand, looking at each other as if across a bridgeless gulf. For at once—in this first interview in which their mutual interest was freely expressed, and the restraint between them openly dashed aside—the true spirit of true love flamed high in both their souls. When the flame is pure, its tendency is ever upwards.

"I could not love thee, dear, so much  
Loved I not honour more !"

is the natural utterance of the love that "itself takes part against itself."

Carlos and Elma never knew whether it was minutes or seconds that passed then, or what words broke from their lips, or whether they spoke at all.

According to his old habit, Carlos's restless fingers wandered over the table, and closed on the first object they met. It was the silver paper-knife which had travelled away with Geoffrey over the seas when he quitted Saxby Towers so many years ago, and had returned with him when he returned to his old home. Elma knew and recollected that oxydised silver knife well. Impulsively she stretched out her hand and took it from him, and read the motto engraven upon it.

"Do you remember this," she said, "one evening at Inkermann Villa—before you went abroad? This was your favourite motto—and mine. It must be your motto always—'Sans peur et sans reproche !'"

"It shall !" he said, and caught her hand in his. "The weakness you have caused, it is you who shall help me to defy ! You are the temptation, and you are the strength. So help me God, I will be loyal to my word and faith ! And this is the seal upon the bond ! Elma ! Just one !" He lifted her hand to his lips, and kissed it half-timidly, half-passionately.

"The first," he said, "and this the last—the very last !"

Unfortunately, of that "very last," a glimpse was caught by other eyes than theirs. Dora, having discovered that Elma had gone to speak to Carlos in the library, hastened to interrupt the interview, and hastened not alone ; Alfred was with her.

Carlos had his back turned to the door. Elma,

trembling and breathless, was only conscious of two things in the world—one, the touch of his lips upon her hand, the other, the absolute necessity of this interview ending instantly. It was the moment of keenest joy, of bitterest pain, she had ever known. They must part at once, she felt, while yet they had the power to part, before her resolution gave way, or his love broke all bounds. This mutual temptation, she knew, was too strong to be played with for another minute. Lost in this whirl of thought, she did not hear at first the opening of the smooth-hinged noiseless library door.

Dora stood still upon the threshold, beholding with silent amazement and indignation the pleasing spectacle of her own betrothed kissing Elma's hand, for just half a second before the two culprits became aware of her presence.

Then Elma with a start and almost a cry, snatched her hand from Carlos ; then Carlos turned and looked into the resentful reproachful face of his Dora, behind whom stood her brother, with an unpleasant smile on his lips.

"I'm afraid we intrude !" said Dora satirically. "I beg your pardon, Miss Dalziel ! Alfred, we had better go, and leave this interesting interview to continue."

"It is ended," said Carlos, pale with deep vexation, as much for Elma's sake as for his own. "Tell Ina," he added, addressing her with marked respect and courtesy, "that whatever she wishes will be agreeable

to me. I'll come and talk to her about it whenever she likes."

"I will go and tell her," rejoined Elma, and swept out of the room, with her head erect and her step free and firm. She was like a young war-horse who "paweth and rejoiceth and scenteth the battle afar off." Combat, antagonism, and danger always roused instead of crushing or subduing her spirit. At the door she paused. It seemed cowardly to leave Carlos by himself, to get out as best he could from an awkward position. It seemed like deserting a comrade in the ranks of the enemy. Yet she could only increase the awkwardness of the position by remaining. Feeling this, she did not turn back, but went on away from the library, leaving Carlos to fight his own battle.

"I suppose we are not allowed to make any inquiries about this secret understanding—these mysterious messages?" began Dora.

"There's no secret; there's no mystery," he replied. "Miss Dalziel was only speaking of her sister's wish to return to London. I merely agreed to her wishes."

"And is it customary, Carlos, may I ask," put in Alfred, "in the country where you were brought up, to seek private opportunities of kissing a young lady's hand on such a very simple occasion as her sister's wish to go to London?"

"I did not seek the opportunity."

"We are to infer then that the young lady gave it you?"

"You are to infer nothing disrespectful of her," responded Carlos flushing. "See here, Alfred: Dora may say to me what she likes; but *you* shall not."

"I don't choose to say all I think," answered Dora with asperity. "I can only regret having entered the library at such an unfortunate moment. I ought to have remembered that it was a *favourite rendezvous*."

"My dear Dora," said Alfred, "had you not perhaps better retire, and leave Carlos with me?"

"No, don't Dora!" said Carlos, unwilling to trust his temper with the endurance of one of Alfred's dignified superior homilies; "you had better not. Say what you've got to say."

"I have, as Dora's brother, a right to speak in this matter," Alfred interposed again. "And first I must say that I do not regard your explanation, Carlos, as at all a satisfactory one."

"It is the only one I have to give. I gave it to Dora, not to you!" replied Carlos haughtily.

"And I do not regard it as satisfactory either," said Dora. Alfred spoke almost simultaneously with her. "I must request you to control your temper, Carlos," he said, himself white with anger. "You see that what you call explanation in no way satisfies even Dora; and your manner is not calculated to make amends to her. I must press for some further excuse or apology."

"And I must press you to interfere no further between us," retorted Carlos. "Leave me with your sister. I have not a word more upon this subject to say to *you*."

"And by what right do you order me from this room?" burst out Alfred, suddenly furious, and uttering his words with low concentrated malice; "or rather how did you obtain the right? If you dare to defy me you will learn that there is another subject upon which I have explanations to demand, and which I might well insist on exacting."

"What other subject?" asked Carlos surprised.

"What other subject?" echoed Dora eagerly curious.

Alfred looked at Carlos with vindictive hatred and jealousy. He had not intended to speak, but on the impulse of the moment he spoke.

"What was that paper in my uncle's private desk? that paper freshly sealed up which you hid away when I came in? that paper which has been concealed and kept secret ever since?"

"Carlos, what was it?" exclaimed Dora.

"I cannot tell you," Carlos said.

"Is it not strange, Carlos, that you cannot tell the contents of a paper you held in your hand, and which you have had every chance of secretly disposing of? It is as strange as that you, who were the chief attendant upon my uncle, alone with him night and day, should have unaccountably slept on the last night of his life,

and left him the opportunity of taking the opiate that helped him to his death! After this, it is not so strange that the only will found should leave you his heir!"

Here Mrs. Atherdale and Christine came in, and both looked amazed and distressed as they caught Alfred's last words, and noticed the decidedly inimical expressions on the two young men's faces.

"What is the matter?"

"The matter is," said Carlos quietly, but with a dangerous quietude, "that Alfred is accusing me of treachery and fraud—yes, and insinuating a hint of murder to crown all!"

"You draw a very plain conclusion from the observations I made, and which I am glad to repeat," said Alfred, whose "envy, hatred, and malice" had led him far beyond any consideration of prudence. "I repeat that the story of the sealed paper which my uncle confided to your charge that night, ought to be told. I repeat that I am not satisfied with the evidence regarding the immediate cause of his death, and that, had the doctors done their duty, *you* would have been more severely cross-questioned than you were."

"Slandering, eavesdropping coward! eat your words!" exclaimed Carlos, beside himself, bursting upon Alfred with the terrible outbreak of a temper ordinarily equable and gentle, whose rare explosions are the more alarming on account of their very rarity.

Alfred, who, to do him justice, was no physical coward, took a step forward as readily on his side. But here, before the war of words could go further, the witnesses interfered. Christine flew to Carlos, and flung her arms round him fearlessly, regardless of the white wrath of his face and the lightning of his eyes. Mrs. Atherdale folded Alfred in a similar restraining embrace. Dora burst into tears and ran between the two parties (keeping a safe distance from her irate fiancé), and all three tearfully entreated.

"Oh, my dear, dear boy!" "Oh, there must be some sad mistake!" "Carlos, don't be so violent, pray!" "Oh, my dear boy, don't say anything to irritate your cousin, please!"

"Don't all look at me as if I was a grizzly bear," said Carlos, calming down. "There, let me go, Christine. I'll not touch him."

"There had better be no further discussion just now," said Mrs. Atherdale anxiously. "Alfred, I want you; you will come with me? Carlos, pray don't excite yourself. No doubt everything can be explained; but just now, take my advice, let the matter rest a little; don't continue this interview."

Mrs. Atherdale's advice was certainly the best that could be given; and she forthwith carried out her own share of it by leading Alfred away with her. Dora and Christine, quite subdued and frightened, and holding each other by the hand, followed, leaving

Carlos alone. As the door closed behind them, through all his resentment there pierced a twinge of wounded feeling.

"*I'm* left alone !" he thought. "Not one of them stays with me !"





## CHAPTER XVIII.

“IT’S NOT THE TIME TO DISPUTE.”

Take hands and part with laughter,  
Touch lips, and part with tears !—  
Where crushed by three days’ pressure  
Our three days’ love lies slain !  
And earlier leaf of pleasure,  
And latter flower of pain !

—*Swinburne.*

**T** was a curious and uncomfortable state of things at Saxby Towers that day. Alfred and Carlos were carefully kept apart ; and Mrs. Atherdale endeavoured to mediate between them, but in vain. Neither would consent to send conciliatory messages to the other. Dora was commissioned to “try and soften Carlos,” but as she only wept and reproached him, and teased him to tell her “what that paper was,” her intervention did not do much good.

Christine also brought her influence to bear upon Alfred, but with as little result.

“My dear Christine,” he said, “it distresses me to be obliged to think ill of your brother ; but his con-

duct appears to me open to severe criticism and suspicion. Your sisterly affection naturally blinds you, dear ; nor can I blame this little weakness. But my opinion cannot be changed without some explanation or assurance, which Carlos is evidently either unable or obstinately unwilling to give. His conduct altogether has drawn down my entire disapprobation ; nor could I ever consent, feeling as I do, to take the initiative in any way whatever."

Christine carried reports to Elma ; and between the latter and Mrs. Atherdale, a delicate version of the affair was gently told to Ina. She looked a little naturally hurt at first, at the idea of any quarrel or high words between the two nephews so soon after their uncle's funeral-day ; then she appeared distressed for Carlos's sake.

"Poor dear boy," she said, "he is utterly incapable of any deceit or double-dealing. Alfred must be labouring under some sad mistake."

"Has Carlos ever mentioned any document—any codicil to the will, or anything, to you ?" asked Mrs. Atherdale doubtfully.

"No, never," Ina replied.

"It is odd," continued the other lady ; "I am of course very fond of Carlos ; I am sure I have always regarded him quite as a son ; but I can't understand his secrecy in this very simple matter. And he really is so violent, my dear ! I feel quite overcome still, and poor Dora is completely upset !"

Mrs. Atherdale softly applied the corner of her handkerchief to her eyes, and looked with a reproachful significance at Elma, unnoticed by Ina.

"I am very sorry," Ina said. "I am sure when Carlos is himself again, he will be sorry too."

"I hope so, my dear. It is very sad. But Carlos really does need some looking after. He behaves curiously in many things, and I think Alfred had *double* reason for finding fault with him," Mrs. Atherdale added, casting another significant and disapproving glance upon Carlos's fellow-culprit—the fair aider and abettor in his misconduct—who held her head high and kept her post by her sister's side.

"I would not tease Carlos by pressing him with questions that must seem suspicious and unkind," said Ina Atherdale when her sister-in-law had departed. "I trust him, and I would not vex him by any appearance of mistrust, dear boy!"

Whereupon Elma slid her arm round her sister's waist and nestled her head down on her shoulder, half in a sudden gush of affection, half to hide the tell-tale look she felt was in her own eyes.

Carlos's familiar step in the corridor—Carlos's well-known quick double tap at the door—aroused them both. Elma stood up startled and turned pale; but as he entered the paleness altered to a burning blush.

She felt that she and Carlos were regarded as fellow-culprits; she knew that, to a certain degree, such they

decidedly were. They must both undeniably plead guilty to imprudence and to a disregard of the exigencies of his position as Dora's betrothed. Still, bearing every word of their interview, as Elma did, in her heart, she was not a whit inclined to repent. In the same circumstances she would have said the same again. Since those moments, her impulse to commit the imprudence of flinging herself into the arena of battle and taking up arms impetuously in Carlos's defence, and ranging herself defiantly on his side, had been so strong that it took all her strength and reason to overmaster it. Now, at seeing him, all her high and warlike and defiant spirit sank quenched in the crimson flood of utter confusion and shame and agitation that suffused her face.

"May I come in?" said Carlos (unnecessarily, as he was already in the room), looking from Ina to Elma with a scrupulous deference and reserve.

"Come to me, of course, dear," replied Ina affectionately.

Elma stood uncertain ; she wished to avoid Carlos ; yet she did not wish to leave him alone with her sister, for fear any agitating or disturbing interview should take place.

"Are you angry with me?" Carlos asked, flinging himself into a chair by Ina's side and looking straight into her face.

"No," she said frankly and kindly, "why should I be? I am sure you never meant to give me—or any

one else—any cause for anger. I am very sorry for this misunderstanding, dear boy, of course.”

“I thought maybe they had been worrying you about it; I thought, to speak plain, they would likely set you to thinking hard of me. I *did* forget myself, I guess—but that’s neither here nor there. I came to see that you were not troubled. If you had thought bad of me too, I could not have helped it, of course; but I’d have done my best to set things square before you. I’m glad to know there’s no need.”

Elma, seeing now that she might safely leave them, turned to the door, and as she went she looked at Carlos with eyes that encouraged and exalted, understood and trusted, and—some readers of physiognomy would have said—loved. Then she went to her room and sat thinking intently and agitatedly, and wondering how this episode would end.

The upshot of this interruption of the peace of the Atherdale family was, as might have been expected, simply a packing of boxes and a drive to the railway-station. Both the combatants remaining obdurate, Alfred departed from Saxby Towers the following morning with his affectionate mother, sisters, and betrothed in his train. They would have felt it awkward to remain behind him, and Mrs. Atherdale was glad to get him away under her maternal care.

For one thing, she regarded Carlos as a sort of gunpowder-barrel, which might explode at any moment; she would have liked to have had him

locked in his room until her dear boy was safe out of the house. Besides she thought that there was really a better chance of the breach being healed when absence and a brief lapse of time should have cooled both parties, than while they were still under the same roof, and still both full of smouldering ill-feeling which might at any hasty word burst into flame again.

As regarded the cause of the quarrel, Mrs. Atherdale took a soothing half-and-half view of things. She did not suppose Carlos would do anything dishonourable ; still Alfred was too reasonable and too good to be suspected of harbouring baseless suspicions. There was, of course, some paper kept mysterious, though it might not be anything to do with wills or codicils, or other legal things ; still it was only natural that Alfred should wish for some satisfactory explanation. As to Alfred's insinuations about the cause of Geoffrey's death, even his most devoted family thought that the less said about *that* the better. "Dear Alfred did not quite know what he was saying ; and of course he meant nothing." For although they did not thoroughly understand Carlos, they knew him well enough for it to be utterly impossible that to those insinuations of Alfred's they could ever have given one moment's ear, or even deemed them worth opposition. Dora, in all her thoughts and wonderings, was very much with her mother ; only additionally aggrieved because she thought that "Carlos might have trusted *her* !" and "it was wicked of him to go on so with

Elma." Which latter grievance was certainly right and reasonable enough.

Christine's affectionate heart was nearly torn in two by the estrangement between her brother and her lover. She wished to stay and take care of Carlos in his unaccustomed position as master of an establishment, yet she could not bear to let Alfred leave without her, especially as she knew how he would resent her remaining behind. Of course, in the conflict of these two affections, sisterly love naturally and speedily went to the wall, although it did not give up the ground without a struggle.

Carlos and Alfred took no farewell of each other. Carlos had an ineradicable hatred of giving his hand save in all sincerity of good feeling. He knew that he could not give it so to Alfred, nor Alfred to him. Therefore although the best carriage and horses in the stables were ready to convey the departing guests to the station, although a goodly selection of dainties for the journey was packed up for their refreshment on the way, and all the resources of the establishment ransacked for any luxury or necessity that could be convenient to any one of them, Carlos himself did not come into the hall to see them off. The train being an early one, his non-appearance downstairs did not look so remarkable as it would otherwise have done. The ladies of the party went to say good-bye to him, and also to Ina and Elma.

Mrs. Atherdale addressed him as her "dear boy,"

remarked hopefully that "everything was sure to come all smooth presently," and "trusted that he would soon be coming to London, when of course they would meet."

Christine clung round his neck and kissed him fondly as she whispered, "Good-bye, Carlos dear ! Don't think hard of me for leaving you."

Dora was the last to take her farewell ; the other two passed out of the room and left her with Carlos for one parting minute. She let him kiss her as usual as he said good-bye, but she did not return the embrace. Her eyes were full of tears, half angry and half grieved.

"Good-bye, Carlos," she said. "I don't think you have behaved rightly to me. I won't reproach you. I forgive it, but I don't forget it."

"If I have wronged you or grieved you, Dora, I am very sorry for it," he said gravely ; adding with more tenderness, "Have I grieved you, little one ?" But Dora was not responsively tender.

"It could not have been pleasant to my feelings to find you kissing that girl's hand," she replied. "And I don't think your obstinate secretiveness and reserve is fair to me. But we've no time to dispute about that now."

"No, it's not the time to dispute. It's the time to say good-bye. I'm sorry you are so hard on me, Dora."

"I'm not harder than you deserve," said Dora,

resentfully still, but with a little tremble in her voice. If she stayed any longer, she felt she should break down somehow. She would either melt into tears and "make it up," which she would not allow herself to do ; or she would fire up into more angry reproaches, and quarrel with him perhaps for ever, which she did not want to do either ! And then the carriage was at the door. So she added hastily, 'There, good-bye !'

She held out her hand, pressed his with one half-relenting look, and then hurried away downstairs to join the rest of the departing guests.

They parted so ; and it was about as unsatisfactory a parting as ever took place between lovers, even in this world where lovers' partings are so common, and commonly so sad, and too often so unsatisfactory ! For these separations on half understandings, half explanations, half faiths and half mistrusts, are sadder than the saddest severance where all is known and all resolved.





## CHAPTER XIX.

"THIS IS GOOD-BYE."

That only touch, that feeling only  
Enough we found—we found too much !  
For the unlit shrine is hardly lonely  
As that the old fire forgets to touch.

—Swinburne.

**W**HEN the roll of wheels down the carriage-drive and the heavy closing of the hall-door, told Carlos the rest of the Atherdales had gone, and left him, the free and absolute master of his own house, "monarch of all he surveyed," he sighed with a feeling that was half regret and half relief. His gentle, loving sister, and his pretty and charming, if *exigeante*, betrothed cousin, had left him ; *but*—there was a large *but* in the case—he had Ina and Elma with him still.

Only for one day more, however. They had not swerved from their plan of going to London ; but Ina had shrunk from joining the party of Atherdales. She felt weak and depressed, and preferred travelling to town alone with her sister, to whom she now clung

closer than ever, and whose silent sympathy surrounded her with something of consolation. Besides this, Ina's constant regard for Carlos suggested to her that if the same hour removed the whole family from the house at once, he would probably feel the sudden loneliness weigh upon him, especially under all the circumstances, with something of bitterness.

Still she was not quite easy about the prudence of throwing him and her pretty sister together even for one day longer. And once she said to Elma, with a lingering, hesitating look of affection and anxiety,

"You know how I trust Carlos, in all things, dear. I need not tell you I trust *you* implicitly too. You were always fond of flirting, little sister. But *now*—and *here*—I need not say I rely on you."

"You need not indeed, Ina!" the girl replied almost passionately and bitterly, with tears springing to her eyes. "I promise you that you shall never regret trusting me this once!"

So those three had just one day alone at Saxby Towers. A quiet and melancholy day it was of course, while the shadow of the recent loss hung still so heavily over them all. But to two out of the three there was a strange mingling of sweet and bitter in that one day together; and the quiet uneventful hours seemed to fly all too fast.

Yet in those few flying hours, if "Time be counted by heart-throbs," a long time was lived.

He did not see her alone, except for a few brief mo-

ments, during which each kept their eyes studiously averted from the other, for both were true to their promises and their faith. But when Ina was with them, they let their eyes meet often, though Elma's had now learnt to sink shyly before his, and though neither allowed their looks to tell too plainly to each other what their lips were forbidden to speak. When she was looking away from him, then was the time he took the full liberty of drinking in her beauty with earnest and longing, yet renouncing, gaze. And when his attention was directed to anything away from her, she too fixed on his face the full glory and gloom of her dark sad eyes—sad as a grey night, yet beautiful as the stars between the clouds.

The next morning he drove with the two ladies to the station. Ina, pale and melancholy in her deep mourning, silently and tearfully bade him farewell as they stood on the platform. The train not being however quite ready to start, Carlos lingered on with them still, and stepped into the carriage where they took their seats, and made them comfortable, and arranged their bags and parasols in the netting for them. The parting minute, postponed to the very latest, came at length. The bell rang. Carlos swung himself out of the carriage. Standing on the platform he stretched his hand to Elma once more.

"Good-bye—this is good-bye!" he said, and wrung her hand almost painfully hard.

"Good-bye," she whispered, as his blue eyes met her

dark ones in one parting passionate look that told its tale.

Then the guard came along briskly and shut the door.

Carlos went back dull and lonely to Saxby Towers.

He cheered himself up by trying to take an interest in the neighbourhood, wandering about the grounds and the village, getting into conversation at the cottages, patting the babies' heads, and throwing pennies to the boys. The people naturally liked him, and showed that they did so, treating him with a simple cordial respect that pleased him. He began to think that being a landed gentleman was a pleasant thing, and to make plans for forming Saxby into a model village according to his own ideas. While he was out two or three of the neighbouring gentry called, but he did not trouble himself with regrets at having missed them. He found the solitude of the great house rather oppressive, and was often out in the village.

He wrote to Dora—not a very long letter, because he steered clear of all allusions to the difference between himself and her brother ; and, not being gifted with the faculty of correspondence, found that he had very little to say. Nor was his letter one of the flowery and sentimental class that almost daily amuses the readers of Breach of Promise cases ; for ardent professions were not very much in his line, and now he would have regarded them as contemptible and hypocritical, and furthermore would have been doubt-

ful as to how Dora might receive them. For that young lady had a quick tongue and temper, and could also sneer in an unpleasant way.

Just as Carlos was beginning to decide that he might in time enjoy the life at Saxby however, an unpleasant little incident occurred.

Old Forester, the butler, appearing with a troubled face, mentioned that Stevens the footman had been drinking more than he ought, and was annoying the women-servants, threatening to punch the men's heads, and absolutely refusing to retire to his room.

Carlos took his way accordingly down to the lower regions, where he found Sarah scolding, Lewis lecturing, and Stevens stretched out in a chair, with his feet extended before him, holding Molly's hand. His mood appeared to have shifted from the pugilistic to the affectionate; for he was squeezing the kitchenmaid's plump fingers lovingly as he said,

"Molly's—a—hic!—a good girl. She—ain't—a spitfire—I—like Molly—Sarah, you—go and be d——d!"

"Well, Stevens, how are you? What's up? Don't trouble to rise; you are not well, are you?" said Carlos, making his appearance on the scene.

"No, sir, that's it! I'm not well. Sarah—*she* says—I'm drunk. I tell her—if there's anybody that way here, it ain't me—it's her!"

"If that's the case, Stevens, then certainly there's

nobody drunk here," observed Carlos, cutting short an outburst from the indignant Sarah.

"Just so, sir—that's what I say. You don't think *I* am?"

"Well, you *ought* to be the best judge in that case," replied Carlos, with a mischievous twinkle in his laughter-loving eyes.

"That's what I say, sir. I'm the best judge. You're a good master, sir. I always liked you—I always says, 'He's a good sort. He wouldn't be hard on a poor fellow.' I don't believe a word about you getting this place—and a fine place it is—by ways as wasn't straight. I don't hold with what folks say——"

"What stuff is he talking! Stop, shut up, Stevens!" interrupted Forester. But Stevens continued,

"I says—you know I said it—'Crooked ways ain't the road a young gentleman like that walks, not even to get what he wants.' I stick to you, sir. An 'umble friend—but a true one." Here he wept and clasped his young master's hand, and shed a maudlin tear or two upon it.

The young master's face had grown grave; he looked somewhat troubled and annoyed, but in no way angry or abashed.

"Will you give me a proof of your friendly feeling, Stevens?"

"Don't mind the stuff he talks, sir, he's not in his right mind," put in Forester.

"I've said no harm," persisted Stevens. "I only says I won't believe anything against my master."

"Well now, to prove good faith and feeling, just come up to your room and rest. It will do you all the good in the world," said Carlos, and carried off from the kitchen the troublesome inmate, who went with him docilely, professing all the way upstairs his affection for his master.

Having disposed of him, Carlos called old Forester up to him.

"What did Stevens mean by those allusions to 'crooked ways,' and his other mysterious hints?" he asked, fixing his eyes on Forester, who looked away from him uneasily.

"I don't know, sir; who can account for what crazy notions a drunken man takes into his head?"

"Yes, you do know, Forester," said Carlos, quietly ignoring the latter clause of the man's answer. "You'll tell me too. I must know."

"Sir, it is such foolishness—mere tipsy maundering. Well then, if you will have it, sir, it's only that it got wind—something was overheard, sir—that there had been hot words between Mr. Alfred and you—something about you being always day and night with the late master Mr. Geoffrey, and some nonsense, I don't know what, about a paper. Then you see, sir, the women gabbled and babbled, as women will, wondering about things as didn't concern them; and this foolish fellow, Stevens, must have picked up some

of this tittle-tattle. I hope, sir, you'll be pleased not to be too hard upon him ; he didn't know what he was saying."

"Hard on him?" repeated Carlos, with a half amused, half bitter, smile through his vexation. "Well, Forester, it would be strange if I were *hard on* the poor fellow for saying he'd stick to me in spite of all this slime that's thrown on me behind my back. If my friends only stick as fast as this slander will stick to me, I shall have considerably faithful friends."

These were probably the very first bitter or cynical words Carlos had uttered in his twenty-one years. He went to his room that night utterly disgusted with the country-life that in the morning had seemed to him not unpromising, and with his resentment against Alfred blown into fiercer flame than ever.

The next day he went for a walk about the village and the neighbourhood, and happened to overtake a little distance from the village a little girl trotting along with a big dog. The child stared at Carlos, who, tall and young and handsome, with his free step and his bright fair hair, was not likely to be passed without a glance, especially in an obscure country lane. He stopped and spoke to the child, and slackened his quick pace to walk beside her and the dog. The little girl was talkative, and would have confirmed old Forester in his opinion of her "gabbling babbling" sex. Carlos was speedily in possession of the facts that her name was Jenny Davis, and the dog's name

Rover, that her father lived in the cottage by the blacksmith's, that she had no mother, but two aunts, both in service ; that Aunt Jane was still-room maid at Sir John Graham's and Aunt Anne housemaid up at the Towers. Furthermore that Aunts Anne and Jane frequently disagreed, and that the subject of their latest difference had been Mr. Atherdale up at the Towers. That Aunt Jane said nobody would ever know the rights of what he'd done, but it was something bad. And that Aunt Anne had stuck up for him, and had called Aunt Jane a "wicked calomel-eater," by which Carlos conjectured that she had intended to accuse her of calumniating. Jenny Davis then artlessly babbled on about facts of her own family mainly interesting to herself, invited Carlos to come home with her and see her father, and summed up by asking whether he came from London, and what was his name ?

"I came from London, and from places further off still," he replied, "and I wish I was back there again. As for my name, little Jenny Davis,—well! I know yours ; but you needn't know mine. I think it's likely this place won't know much more of me."

He went home moody and deeply annoyed, all his wrath concentrating upon Alfred. He perhaps exaggerated the effect on public opinion (the gossip of the neighbourhood of Saxby constituting public opinion to him) of the suspicions which Alfred, in a burst of temper, had uttered ; and which, perhaps un-

known to Alfred, had crept abroad and given grounds for this village-gossip. The extenuating facts that Alfred had at first spoken in haste and heat of temper, and that he might not have intended his words to go further, Carlos, in natural enough resentment, utterly ignored. He only remembered that Alfred, and Alfred alone, had set the ball rolling, which appeared to Carlos to grow, like a snowball tossed from boy to boy, bigger and bigger. If he had reflected calmly and philosophically, he would probably have seen that like a snowball it would in time melt away, and disappear and be forgotten. But this view of the subject did not occur to him. "Live it down" is the very last motto a nature like Carlos Atherdale's ever acts upon. Such a nature will hold its ground against actual fire and sword to the death; will stand immovably at its post under material rain of leaden shot; will defy for an hour or a day the united forces of the world. But let the post be one of long moral trial, of passive patience and inactive endurance for years, of daily *little* ordeals, and the nature that would have led a forlorn hope—ay, or, braver still, have mounted the scaffold unflinchingly!—will turn away; *this* is not the place it was created to fill.

Carlos would never dream of "living down" a slander, great or small; he would think only of tramping on it and killing it.

Against Alfred he was furiously wroth; and on the impulse of the hour he wrote an antagonistical letter

to him, making him responsible for slanderous rumours floating about the village, and demanding apology for the injury that had been done, and retraction of the insulting and accusing words which had evidently set these rumours afloat. By that evening's post, crossing his letter to Alfred, he received from Dora an icy little epistle with a stinging postscript, which arrived opportunely to annoy and embitter him still further.

"A nice warm welcome I should get if I went to London!" he thought.

And at Saxby Towers he was beginning to feel he could not and would not stay. The whole place was fast becoming unendurable to him. His proud frank nature withered under the consciousness of a shapeless undefined slander floating in the atmosphere. He resented it fiercely and suffered from it acutely, though the resentment and suffering were alike silent and repressed. He fancied, if visitors called, that they were cold and estranged in their manner. He fancied the people he spoke to in the village looked at him suspiciously; he pictured to himself the whisperings and wonders of his own servants' hall. The idea of a vague indefinite stain of suspicion clinging to his hitherto stainless name, was always present, galling him with perpetual bitterness. And in this mood he read in the newspapers the stories of the struggle which was then at its height between the two halves of a great nation.

The eyes of Europe were turned across the Atlantic

to the scene of the conflict; the papers of Europe were filled with details of the winter battles on the banks of the Rappahannock. The world was waiting to see what would be the next move of the shattered army of the Potomac, and how long the Confederate banners would wave from the still indomitable walls of Vicksburg; whether the North would regain and retain its supremacy, or whether the South, by a prolongation of the desperate struggle, could shake itself free from the yoke of the Union.

The details that were interesting to all the civilized world were thrillingly exciting to Carlos. Born in the West, bred in the South, he held the country where he had lived through infancy and youth as his true home. His sympathies were ardently and faithfully enlisted on the Southern side; his friends were fighting for the Southern cause. One of the dearest comrades of his boyhood lay buried at Mill Springs; another had fallen at the siege of New Orleans. The only two remaining members of his mother's family were both amongst the gallant defenders of Vicksburg; the names he read in the lists of the killed and wounded were many of them too familiar to him; and then the names of those other more fortunate ones whom also he knew, and of whom he read as honoured and distinguished, set his soul on fire. As he read the accounts of the victories and defeats, the wild and restless element of his nature rose to the ascendant. Recollections of childhood and early youth crowded

upon him ; the thirst for the freer, wilder, larger life he had once known possessed him ; and the power of the old days seized its sway again.

While his impulse was still half a dream, while his ideas were still only half developed, he received a sharp letter from Alfred, guarded in terms, but obstinately refusing the apology or retractation Carlos had not too graciously requested. The skies were dull and cold and leaden ; the atmospheric influences were depressing ; the winter rain and sleet pattered mournfully and monotonously against the windows, as Carlos read Alfred's coldly insulting and obstinately suspicious letter. Then he re-read Dora's freezing little epistle with its parting prick in the postscript, and looked out at the miserable sunless sky—and the impulse became a resolution, and the idea a fixed and settled purpose.

For the wandering and roving element was as strong in Carlos Atherdale's nature as it had been in others of his race. Only until now it had never manifested itself so strongly ; its temptations had never seized him with a grasp so irresistible.





## CHAPTER XX.

### OUTWARD BOUND.

Stand up ! stand out ! where the wind comes in,  
And the wealth of the seas pours over you ;  
As its health floods up to the face like wine,  
And a breath blows up from the Delaware  
And the Susquehanna ! We feel the might  
Of armies in us ! the blood leaps through  
The frame with a fresh and keen delight !

—*Jouquin Miller.*



MS. EDWIN ATHERDALE and her family were sitting round the breakfast-table at Inkermann Villa. The fire was glowing cheerfully ; and although the barren leafless trees were tossing in the frosty wind outside the windows, within the room the aspect was all of peace and homely comfort. Mrs. Atherdale was busy pouring out the coffee ; Christine, who is quite one of the family now, was cutting and buttering bread for the two youngest olive-branches ; Dora was lifting up the covers and contemplating the contents of the dishes thoughtfully, debating whether she would take ham or haddock ; while Alfred, occupying an arm-chair,

perused the *Times*; when the morning's letters were brought in.

"Two for you, ma'am; one for Mr. Alfred. One for Miss Dora, and one for Miss Christine," said the faithful Sarah, distributing them accordingly, and with a particularly sympathetic smile to Miss Dora, for Sarah knew the handwriting well enough.

The letters for the lady of the house were only two "little accounts;" Alfred's was "from an old chum." Christine uttered a little exclamation of surprise as she inspected and turned over the envelope of hers.

"Mine is from Carlos," said Dora, with a glancing at the handwriting as she began to tear off the envelope, with the usual assumption of indifference a girl naturally puts on as a veil over her interest in an especially expected letter.

"So is mine, I think; it is his writing; but the postmark is Liverpool," observed Christine, looking puzzled.

"Why, so it is! Liverpool!" said Dora, reading the postmark on her own letter.

"Well, read the letters, girls, and see what he says. What can the boy be doing at Liverpool?" said Mrs. Atherdale.

"Why Dora! what's the matter?" exclaimed little Letty as Dora's cheeks flushed suddenly.

"What is it, Christine? What does he say?" demanded Alfred, as Christine uttered a faint "Oh!" of surprise and distress.

This is what Carlos said—long letters not being in his way.

“MY DEAR LITTLE SISTER,

“Good-bye for a time. The state of things here is unendurable. Nobody *says* anything I can resent ; but I know what vile rumours are abroad. I want the Atlantic breezes to blow this atmosphere of distrust and suspicion away. Our cause—the cause of our birthplace—is calling me. There’s work to be done in Virginia and Maryland, and I am off to join the ranks of my friends. I’ll come back. It’s only for a time.

“Your affectionate brother

“CARLOS.”

“MY DEAR DORA,

“As my movements are so ‘indifferent to you,’ I have taken a decided step. I sail from here—Liverpool—to-morrow morning.

“When you get this I shall be on the sea. If things had not so turned against me—if you had not cooled and hardened to me as you have—I should be with you now. I will come back to you when the war is over, if not before. I will not fail to return. But go I must. The suspicion once aroused is growing round me. I feel it in the air I breathe. It stifles me. I must get clear of it, and leave it to die out.

“Let them say if they choose that I am flying from

it. I leave slander and malice and scandal behind. I set my face to my sunny southern skies. I set my hand to do what little I can to help a noble work. I thirst for the great Atlantic, and beyond that for the great country and the great cause. What is the use of farewell interviews? I write my only good-byes. When I come back all shall be as you will. I will be in your hands then for ever after. Till then, good-bye.

“CARLOS ATHERDALE.”

These letters were written, as his letters always were in haste, without an approach to reading over or correction. The characteristic handwriting rushed over the pages regardless of blot or irregularity. Still they were legible enough to be read, not only by those to whom they were addressed, but by other members of the family.

“He is mad!” said Mrs. Atherdale.

“I refrain from uttering my opinion, only from my anxiety not to wound Christine’s feelings,” observed Alfred.

“It’s wicked of him! I’ll have no more to do with him,” exclaimed Dora, starting up, with natural enough resentment flashing in her eyes.

“Oh, Dora, he’ll come back! It is thoughtless of him; but he is hurt at people being cold to him,” said Christine.

“My dear Christine, do not let your sisterly

championship carry you to the extent of attempting to justify Carlos's insane and unjustifiable conduct," said Alfred.

Christine's eyes filled with tears ; her heart seemed to rise into her throat ; she was physically incapable of uttering another word, and stole away as soon as possible to her room. Dora had already made a dignified retreat, and was walking up and down with a pencil and note-book, composing rough draughts of an indignant letter to Carlos, which required several references to the dictionary, and twice re-copying, before its composition was deemed strong and effective enough for the occasion.

Meanwhile letters from the truant were also received by Ina Atherdale and the family lawyer. In all he enclosed an address at New Orleans, and all conveyed the same information more or less fully. His letter to Ina was a long one. He entreated her to reside at Saxby Towers in his absence ; saying that he really regarded himself as holding it as much in trust for her as for his own. He asked her to take charge of it for him, provided of course it was no pain or trouble to her. The whole establishment he left entirely under her authority ; and similar instructions had been sent to all concerned. He put it quite as a favour to himself that she should reside absolute mistress, though nominally his deputy, at Saxby Towers. Of Elma he said only, "Is your sister well? Remember me to her."

"This is all through Alfred. It is that unlucky quarrel that has driven Carlos away. I am very sorry," sighed Ina.

"We are all sorry, I am sure," said Elma with downcast eyes. She had listened quietly to the news ; only her face was very pale, and her voice curiously calm and conventional considering the trembling of her lips.

"Poor boy ! dear boy ! so he is gone—gone to that far-off land !" said Ina sadly, leaning her head upon one hand, and stretching out the other to draw Elma nearer her. The younger sister knelt beside the elder and suddenly hid her face on her shoulder.

"Will he come back ?" she whispered presently, as much to herself as to Ina. "When he left us at the station he said 'Good-bye, this is good-bye !' It was good-bye indeed ! but we did not know it then."

"It was good-bye, my little Elma," said Ina caressing the bent head of the tall and stately girl. "Perhaps, darling—who can tell what might have been ? but, perhaps, if things had been otherwise, he might not have gone."

"If things had been otherwise !" repeated Elma, rising up with a sigh, and shaking the hair back from her brow with a resolute look, as if shaking off some thought. "What can that matter ? things are as they are ; and he is gone ; and you and I have arranged to

go and buy bonnets this morning, you know, and we must not let such a trifle stop us," she added with a rather hysterical laugh.

And meanwhile Carlos was standing on the deck of the outward-bound vessel, as she cut her way through the green waves, her prow turned westward, and a path of white foam in her wake pointing backward to the shore. His heart was bounding as he thought of revisiting the land he loved, taking up arms for the cause he espoused with all the ardour of his soul, and leaving hinted slanders and galling suspicions behind him, a whole ocean away.

If a woman's voice haunted him at all, it was not Dora's. If the farewell look of a pair of sorrowful dark eyes had its place in his inmost heart, those eyes were not of his betrothed cousin. It was not of her he thought as the speculation flashed across him.

"Would *she* enjoy this freedom, would she exult in this glorious air and atmosphere of liberty, as I do? Would she feel and sympathise with me?"

He looked at the land as it lessened in the distance; he looked at the blue horizon ahead, and drank in the salt sea air and revelled in the showers of spray tossed up by the paddle-wheels. Oh the glory of that limitless stretch of sea and sky! Oh the splendour of this fresh and sudden sense of wild and boundless liberty!

“Good-bye, England !” he said, taking off his hat to the receding shores, with an earnest, but bright and sanguine farewell.

“And good-bye, Elma !” he added to himself, with a sudden shade of sadness.





## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE OLD AND NEW.

Our memories can retrace  
Each circumstance of time and place ;  
Season and scene come back again,  
And outward things unchanged remain !  
The rest we cannot re-instate—  
Ourselves we cannot re-create—  
Nor set our souls to the same key . .  
As the remembered harmony.

*—Longfellow.*

**S**EASONS have glided away, have rolled over the field of the present down into the gulf of the past. Days that were landmarks ahead in the future, longed for or dreaded, counted upon and expected, have come and gone and fallen into that gulf of shadows where all our memories lie.

The cause which Carlos crossed the Atlantic to add his single strength to the thousands there to uphold, has fallen, and lies buried with the multitude of brave hearts that beat for it and bled for it and died for it. For these, its dead, there is the resurrection !

Among those who came safe and scatheless through the war is Carlos Atherdale.

The inscription on Geoffrey Atherdale's tomb has faded from its first fresh sharp blackness ; his death has become an old loss, a past regret ; the crape worn for him has long been put away ; and only Ina wears mourning still.

Now the flowers of seven summers have scented the gardens of Saxby Towers since Carlos left them ; the frosts of seven winters have silvered the tall old trees. Seven times the spring buds have burst into "tiny leaf" of green ; and now the seventh summer is in its early bloom.

One old elm tree has fallen : one stately beech, that was in its glory when Carlos went away, stands now a scathed and lightning-seared trunk. Otherwise nothing is much changed about the house or grounds of Saxby Towers. But changes many and great have been busy in the Atherdale family during these years.

"How many changes since then !" soliloquises Elma truly, thinking of the seven years past.

The season is early June ; the hour is late afternoon or early evening, as you choose to term it ; and Elma is sitting by the window of her room in Saxby Towers, a book lying open on her lap, her eyes looking absently across the grassy slope.

Years have taken nothing away from her attractions, have not faded her fair fresh complexion, nor set a deeper line on her smooth brow, nor dimmed by a shade the brightness of her eyes. Her half-parted

guileless lips are tender and youthful as ever ; her rich golden-brown hair is arranged in even more massive coils. They are not wholly independent of a little artificial aid, Elma is wont to confess frankly and gaily, secure in a loveliness that simply defied you to attribute any iota of its charms to art. She wears this evening a pale blue dress, with loose transparent sleeves half veiling and half setting off the beauty of her pearly-white rounded arms. She has a hand and arm that might be modelled from a Venus, and that draws envious secret sighs from Dora, who has stumpy fingers, and from Letty and Lizzie, whose arms are thin and unbeautiful in the fashionable short sleeves. There is no wedding-ring on the hand upon which her cheek rests pensively ; she is Elma Dalziel still. And, beautiful and gifted as she is, there is sadness in her look just now.

A volume of "Selections from the Poets," with Christine Atherdale's name on the fly-leaf and a date of some eight years back, has recalled many things to her mind. It was one of Alfred's many little literary gifts to Christine, in the days when he was "forming her mind," and training her by easy steps into poetic appreciation and culture, Elma remembers well ; and opening the book by hazard at Mrs. Hemans' "Graves of a Household," those verses, familiar to her from her earliest schooldays, have freshened the tints of some scarcely-faded memories. Elma has outgrown enthusiasm about that style of poetry which in her early

girlhood she used to copy in extract-books and commit to memory ; but these verses come upon her with the force of old associations now.

“ They grew in beauty side by side,  
 They filled one home with glee.  
 Their graves are 'sever'd far and wide  
 By mount and stream and sea.

One sleeps where southern vines are drest,  
 Above the noble slain !  
 He wrapt his colours round his breast,  
 On a blood-red field of Spain.”

she reads to herself with a softening that almost touches upon tears in her look and voice. Then she laughs at herself, “ But he didn't. And really it's too absurd to sentimentalise about what might have been ! He does *not* sleep beneath southern vines, for all my alarm and wasted anxiety during all that war. He *would have* wrapt his colours round his breast and died, I am sure ; but for one thing he didn't carry the colours, and for another there was luckily no bullet billeted for him. I don't know why I should say *luckily* ! It can be nothing to me now. I've not forgotten him. No, Carlos !” looking across the green turf slope, and apostrophising the absent, “ I never shall nor can *forget* you ! but you seem to have faded and faded to an immeasurable distance in the past. And it is a distance indeed now. Nearly seven years, and many changes,” she pauses, sighs, and murmurs softly, “ Poor Christine !”

For amongst the changes there has been one that clothed all the circle of Atherdales, and others also who were no Atherdales, in sincere mourning.

Alfred and Christine had been married a year and a half when a baby-girl was born to them. It was a delicate fragile infant—they did not tell Christine how delicate, for she was herself very weak, and nervously anxious about her child. One day when she woke and asked for “baby,” they made excuses for not bringing it to her; but when she wept and grew feverish in her entreaties, they were obliged to tell her gently that it was dead. From that hour she faded away; she never smiled again—until she lifted her eyes for the last time to Alfred’s face, and with one parting smile of heavenly love, sank away into the long calm sleep.

Alfred sorrowed for her sincerely, and realized bitterly that, when he lost her, the light of such a love as might never be lavished on him again had faded out of his life, and left it very gloomy.

As to Dora, she had distinctly broken off all engagement with Carlos soon after his sudden departure for America. Six months after that, Mr. Samuel Stebbing, partner in a mercantile firm, with good position and better prospects, proposed to her to share his fortune; and within a year pretty Dora Atherdale, in a state of high delight with her elegant trousseau and roseate anticipations of her new life, became the youthful mistress of a household.

"Carlos would never have done for me, you see, mamma dear," the bride would say, with a well-satisfied little sigh of proper sentiment. "Poor Carlos! I don't blame him. I really was very fond of him. But he never would have settled down. We grow wiser as we grow older; and of course I didn't see then, but I see now, that those restless wandering natures don't do for home. People oughtn't to marry who can't settle down to housekeeping."

The Atherdales were a precocious family in affairs of love and matrimony. Letty Atherdale had grown up, and bade fair to follow Dora's successful example, having been engaged now two or three months. Thus Lizzie only now was left for her mother to guard until she too should be satisfactorily settled.

As for Carlos, he had never touched English ground since the day he had sailed, full of hope and resolution, to join the ranks of the South. He had become one of Lee's gallant army, and given heart and soul to the cause, until it fell, and needed strong arms and devoted hearts no more. Enough had perished for it ere then!

When the war was over, Carlos had joined a quartette of friends bound westward, and amongst the myrtle and orange groves of Lower California had lounged away one gorgeous tropical summer. Then the busy city of San Francisco had drawn him up to it, and there one enterprise, plan or speculation, after another, had detained him year after year. He

had revisited all the scenes of his boyhood ; and although he sometimes spoke vaguely of "coming back," the years passed and he did not come. He kept up an occasional correspondence with the English branches of his family, writing by far the most frequently to Ina Atherdale.

Now this summer Mrs. Edwin Atherdale, Alfred and Lizzie, Dora and her husband and children, were staying with Ina at the Towers. Letty was spending a month with the family of her fiancé. Christine's death had healed the breach between Alfred and Carlos. Far off as the latter was, he felt that their mutual sorrow bridged over the gulf ; he forgot and forgave all, and only remembered that his gentle sister had been Alfred's wife, and that husband and brother shared the same loss. So the quarrel was put away and supposed to be forgotten, and its very memory kept out of sight. Carlos always insisted that Ina should have charge of Saxby Towers, and lavished upon her the freest permission, the fullest license, to deal as she chose with every stick, stone, and servant on the premises. Especially he trusted that she would enjoy the society of whatever guests she chose ; and when the estrangement between the two cousins was at an end, Carlos was prompt in his next letter to suggest to Ina that to hear of Alfred's presence at the Towers would be a pleasure to him.

So Alfred came, again and again, and every time he came he saw Elma Dalziel. When she was a girl of

eighteen in Devonshire, he had admired her perhaps more than she knew. During his engagement to Christine, she had fascinated him and attracted him to her again ; and had she encouraged his growing attachment, he might even have been openly false to Christine, though this of course he would not acknowledge to himself. Now, when Christine had been dead four years, he had begun to think, what was there to stand between him and Elma Dalziel? She was free of hand and (so far as he knew) of heart. She was as beautiful and winning as ever, and he was more in love with her than he had been with any other woman in his life before. Christine he had never been actually "in love with." He had loved her always in a calm way, and as his wife she had been very dear to him, and her faithful, watchful, selfless devotion necessary to his comfort. But now that the wound of her loss had been healed over by all-healing Time, he set his heart upon Elma Dalziel, and resolved to win her.

Elma was not a bit in love with him ; but she liked to be liked, and she liked, from many associations, the very name of Atherdale. Furthermore, she was now a woman, not a girl ; and she knew that the passing years were stealing her youth away. She was well aware of the many weak and selfish points in Alfred's character ; but she had a theory that if a woman becomes once really loved by, and needful to the happiness of, a selfish man, she may retain as strong

a hold on his affection as on the devotion of a more self-abnegating nature. She had arrived gradually, through permitting and recognising Alfred's attentions, to thinking of him a great deal. She had not resolved on anything, and was only vaguely "thinking." The one thing to which she had made up her mind, was, that until she had made up her mind still more, his attentions should stop where they were, and proceed no further.

She went down to dinner with a composed bright face, and all troublesome memories put behind her. In the drawing-room were Mr. and Mrs. Stebbing, Alfred, and Ina. Dora was a plump pretty young matron now, sparkling of eye and smile just as in the old times, a shade of affectation and self-consciousness now and then in her manner, otherwise unaltered.

Ina was even paler and slighter than of old, and the passing years had left their impress on her face, written lines on her broad white brow, and threaded a streak or two of silver through her still luxuriant dark hair. But she was always fair to see; for hers was a spiritual loveliness that time and sorrow may shadow but do not spoil. She lived *in* the world, but not *of* the world now; she glided through her earthly life with her soul in the Heaven where she fondly held her faith that Geoffrey was awaiting her. To that heaven her dreamy eyes were always aspiring; that heaven's forecast and impress hallowed and illuminated her pure pale face. And hopeful, faithful, and

charitable, she was happy ; for rebellious repining was as far from her nature as was the possibility of forgetfulness.

Mr. Stebbing was stout, florid, and good-natured ; very fond and proud of Dora, and happy in his marriage.

Alfred met Elma with a look that told a long tale of admiration very plainly and truly.

“ My favourite dress,” he said, glancing down at the blue grenadine. “ I’m glad you have it on this evening.”

“ Why ? ” she asked sweetly.

“ I heard Sugden telling you the other night that he did not like blue. And he dines here to-night.”

“ How accurately you remember that very uninteresting young man’s tastes ! Had I not better go and change the dress ? ” she said with a smile full of conscious coquetry. Elma would not *be* Elma if she could refrain from flirting on every possible occasion.

“ It is lovely. Sugden shall see you in it.”

“ And be converted,” she said.

Mrs. Atherdale and Lizzie came in. Lizzie, a child no more, but a long-robed young lady of seventeen, taller and thinner than Dora, but not so pretty, less piquante in manner, but gentler in temper, and a greater favourite with both Ina and Elma.

The clergyman and his wife came to dinner, and the curate also, the mild Mr. Sugden, who did not like blue, but who manifestly thought the wearer of the blue

dress dazzling, and who, however, with becoming modesty and discretion left the post of honour in her entertainment open to Alfred, and contented himself with Lizzie Atherdale.

Mrs. Marsh, the clergyman's wife, loved gossip. She was more generous in quartern loaves and flannel petticoats and shillings than in judgment. Her poorer neighbours fared well in practical kindness at her hands ; her richer neighbours provided her unconsciously with food for the gossip her soul loved.

The sad case of Sir John Graham's daughter, who had insisted on marrying a poor—a very poor—but very handsome widower with three children, was discussed with much relish. It was followed by the sadder case of the really disgraceful flirtation between the wife of Mr. Vereker and Captain Huntley, a fascinating married man, whose wife was travelling with her mother in Italy. Much obloquy was heaped on luckless Mrs. Vereker's head ; comparatively little on Captain Huntley, who was popular with ladies ; and some upon the absent Mrs. Huntley.

"As I say, what can she expect ?" observed Mrs. Marsh. If she leaves her husband to go travelling, it is only natural that he should get flirting and attached elsewhere. In her absence it is natural that he should turn to some other affection."

"People always say '*it is natural*,' as if that meant '*it is right*,'" observed Elma.

"Well, whatever is ordained by nature is in all probability right, is it not?" said Alfred, who had not been attending much to the conversation until Elma made that remark.

"I do not think so. One of my many favourite theories is on the subjugation of one's merely 'natural impulses.'"

"Would you then advocate a totally artificial system of morality?"

"Without going quite that length, I think that all systems of morality are to a great extent artificial. The laws of Nature alone would lead to each man's considering only himself, yielding to all temptations, advancing his own well-being at whatever cost to others. Some natural impulses are good; but you cannot say as much for *all*. Then are not those strongest and best who tread down their natural impulses to keep up to their standard of right?"

"On that principle, you would commend those who strain up to the standard held aloft by fanaticism or bigotry, and exacting the cruel sacrifices that fanaticism does exact?"

"If the sacrifices be of self, they may be foolish, misguided, and useless, but there is nobility in their folly. Surely they who are faithful to their standard at any cost to themselves, do well and nobly, although their standard may not be ours, and although their sacrifice is laid at a shrine which we do not hold sacred? We can admire conscientious faith and

loyalty, can we not ? even though they follow another flag than ours ? ”

“ We ” and “ ours ” sounded very pleasant to Alfred when uttered in Elma’s persuasive and winning tones.

“ You are quite right, Elma. You always are,” he said ; for these young people having known each other so many years called each other now by their Christian names. He spoke with a tender and deferential homage in his voice that was a novelty from Alfred’s lips, and by which Elma felt quite touched and gratified.

“ *You* would be loyal to *your* standard,” he added.

“ I should, I hope ; but at the same time,” she said, “ I am afraid I should never elect to follow one that exacted very stern and rigid lines of duty.”

“ But having once elected it, you would be faithful to even its severest exactions, I fancy,” he observed.

“ You are kind to believe in me so far. Most people don’t ! ” she replied with a confidential sweetness as the ladies rose to retire.

In the drawing-room the conversation was not marked by any great variety. It alternated from Miss Graham’s folly to Mrs. Vereker’s imprudence, and back again to the first. Then the gentlemen came in, and then there was a little music. Dora sang, and Mrs. Marsh sang ; and then there was a call for Miss Dalziel to sing.

Alfred accompanied her to the piano, and stood looking at the music portfolio with her.

"Do sing our old favourite, 'Troy Town,' he said. "I have not heard you sing it for a long time."

"No, I don't sing it now," said Elma, who could never dissociate that song from the memory of Carlos's bright handsome face and eager attention as he had stood listening by her side so often, so many years ago. She did not want to think of him to-night. And it was *his* favourite song! and so what right had Alfred to ask for it?

"Do try, Elma!" he said entreatingly, with lowered voice.

"I can't indeed. I've quite forgotten it. I'll sing 'Benedetta' if you like," she said aloud; proposing through pure contradictoriness an Italian air when he had pressed for an English ballad. And so she sang Italian airs, and would not sing "Troy Town," although she made the *amende* to Alfred afterwards by saying sweetly, "No, not even to please *you*!"

And after the music, conversation—that is to say, scandal—had another turn; and then the dinner guests departed.

"If there is one thing for which I entertain a most uncharitable hatred, it is country gossip and spiteful scandal!" exclaimed Elma sincerely when the door had fairly closed upon the visitors.

"Still it is very sad that Mrs. Vereker is so imprudent as to get talked about in the manner she does," said Mrs. Atherdale.

"Nobody ever gets talked about without cause ; there's never smoke without fire," added Dora.

"Cæsar's wife should be above suspicion," observed Ina.

"Ina dear, that's a sentiment far too high-flown for this lower earth," rejoined Elma. "It's impossible to be above the suspicion of some people. It requires purity to be able to have faith in purity. Low minds drag everything down to their own level. If an angel came down to earth, she—or he—would not be above the suspicions of mortals."

"But, my dear Elma, Mrs. Marsh is not a low mind at all ; she is a most charming person," said Dora.

"But, my dear Dora," retorted Elma promptly, "the people with low minds may set the scandal going, by which the people with higher minds allow themselves to be influenced. And I merely made a general statement, which did not allude to the calibre of Mrs. Marsh's mind at all.

Ina smiled to herself quietly as the two young women exchanged passes. Dora and Elma were now quite "good friends" as friends go ; but the effect of the old once-upon-a-time rivalry had never quite worn off ; and they still fenced lightly whenever occasion arose.

Ina and Elma generally spent a leisure half-hour tête-à-tête before going to bed. There was a balcony to Ina's room ; and this night, as it was mild and clear,

they opened the window wide, and went out and leaned over the stone balustrade.

"What are you thinking of, Ina?" asked Elma, as her sister sighed abstractedly.

"I look up to those bright, distant stars, dear. And it seems to me then that my Geoffrey's spirit is not so far from me. It is in the open air and at night—a clear calm night like this—that I feel most fully how undivided we are still. How far off the stars are! and yet how deeply we feel their beauty! He who has left me is surely not so far off as they."

"Undivided!" said Elma, repeating Ina's word reflectively. "Yes, people who are estranged from each other, or lose each other living, may be far more utterly separated than you and he."

"Yet, till you know the blank darkness and mystery of a loss by death, you cannot realize what *never* means!" said Ina earnestly. "I did not know the force of the one little word 'never' until—until that time."

"But it is only 'never in this life,' " replied Elma gently. "And this life is not all, we trust."

"This life seems very long sometimes," murmured Ina, with the patient sweetness of her voice a little shaken by mournful yearning for the lost.

"Yes, long enough to forget—to forget things that seemed once never-to-be-forgotten," observed Elma; and sank into a thoughtful silence, crossing her arms on the balcony and staring up into the midnight blue

"What are *you* thinking of now, Elma?" asked Ina, returning the question her sister had put to her.

"Wondering if we shall ever see Carlos again," replied Elma truthfully.

"I hope so—I think so."

"*You* think so?" said Elma. "*I* don't."

"Is it he whom you have forgotten, and yet once thought you should never forget?" asked Ina gently.

Elma paused before she replied, and then gave the unsatisfactory answer :

"I have not exactly forgotten him. I might know him again if I saw him, or I might not. Don't let us talk about him to-night. There is nothing new to be said about him."





## CHAPTER XXII.

### NOT CHANGED.

She has braided her tresses, and through her tears,  
Look'd away to the West for years—the years  
That I have wrought where the sun tans brown ;  
She shall lift her head—she shall see her lover—  
She shall hear his voice like a sea that rushes,  
And down on his breast she shall hide her blushes.  
And never a care shall her true heart know !  
While the clods are below or the clouds are above her.

—*Joaquin Miller.*

**T**HE next morning has dawned brightly ; the younger members of the party at Saxby Towers (not that any of them are boys and girls now) have taken chairs and cushions out into the garden and are sitting on the lawn.

There is a gentle south-western breeze and a summer-blue sky ; the early June sun is scarcely yet high enough or strong enough to endanger the ladies' complexions ; so they are hat-less and parasol-less. The lawn is soft as green velvet ; the borders are bright with flowers ; and their pretty figures in light dresses blossom on the green turf like larger flowers.

Dora, white-robed and pink-ribboned, like a York and Lancaster rose, is busy bending over a frock she is embroidering for the three-year-old son and heir, who is at present in London with his paternal grandmother. Lizzie Atherdale sits beside her, lounging back in a low chair, and lazily turning over the pages of an illustrated Shakespeare. Elma is curled up in an Oriental way on some red cushions, and looks languid and dreamy and serene enough, with her air of self-possession and composure, to be the Sultana of the harem. The scarlet cushions, the scarlet flowers in her dress and hair (seldom is Elma seen without some red ribbon or red ornament about her) make the brightest spots of colour on the grass, and would draw attention to her even if she were less the queen by nature's right. Alfred is not generally far off from where Elma is. He is one of the group on the lawn now.

"I don't care much for 'Troilus and Cressida,'" remarks Dora.

"What's *your* favourite play, Elma?" asks Lizzie, idly, fluttering over the pages of our immortal poet.

"I don't know; I like them all," Elma replies rather indifferently.

"Oh, *I* know which is *my* favourite," exclaims Dora. "*I* like 'Romeo and Juliet.' I think it's so beautiful!"

"For a love-tragedy, I think I prefer 'Antony and Cleopatra,'" observes Elma.

"Well, I don't care so much for that. I don't like the *moral* of it; and I think it's scarcely a—a—*delicate* play."

Elma smiles, very sweetly, but with a sweetness scarcely complimentary to Dora's intellect. Her eyes half-involuntarily turn to Alfred with that smile. She leaves her answer to him, and he knows it.

"It is the most superb study and perfect analysis of the love that degrades, and the nature that can inspire no other love. The love that a Cleopatra arouses can only enervate and lower—only tempt away from duty, and decoy from the post of honour. Still what a master-passion it is! and what a master-pen that has depicted the character of Cleopatra as perfectly as the ideal innocence and purity of Desdemona and Ophelia."

"I always thought Desdemona *so* insipid—such a 'Griselda!'" says Dora, rather scornfully.

"Love makes Griseldas of most women," remarks Elma, with an air of placid certainty.

"Not of Cleopatras!" observes Alfred smiling.

"We generally turn out to be one or the other; the potter finds us of one of two sorts of clay, Griselda or Cleopatra," Elma rejoins.

"And which, I wonder, would *you* be found?" he asks, in a somewhat lowered tone.

Elma looks at him—with a look that says many things, and might be interpreted many ways; it is thoughtful, it is dreamy, and hard to read aright.

But she makes no answer to his question, and her next remark turns the points and shunts the subject off that line.

"I am very fond of all the Roman plays. 'Julius Cæsar' was one of my childish favourites; and then 'Coriolanus!' Ah, if one could only find actors to play those grand old Romans as they *should* be played, what glorious Shakespearean revivals we might have!"

"Do you like those plays? They never interested me much, there isn't a bit of love in them," says Lizzie Atherdale.

"Love! Does one *always* want love?" replies Elma, with something half-impatient, half weary in her tone. I get tired of the talk of love sometimes. There's not one soul in a hundred capable of it; and we get on very well without it in this world." Her manner grew lighter, and the old surface-coquetry and playfulness came back to it as she added, "I think it is a great deal more plague than profit generally."

Alfred, usually so prone to champion a cause, did not take up the gauntlet now on behalf of Love. He felt annoyed and half offended; he thought her words were discouraging, and his vanity was wounded. Perhaps if he had seen into her heart, and known that she was trying to make up her mind that *she* must "get on very well without love," he might have understood that her words, as regarded his hopes, were rather encouraging than otherwise.

He had made up his mind to avail himself of the first convenient opportunity of "speaking to" Elma, and was vexed that she and Lizzie and Dora kept together. Why, he thought, could they not wander about the garden paths in twos and threes, instead of keeping all side by side. He wished to put his fate to the touch, but it seemed that destiny was against him that day. Elma was sprightly and fascinating at luncheon, and did not look dreamily absent, or make cynical or discouraging observations. Alfred prepared himself for the plunge, but had no chance of making it, in spite of Elma's smiles and sweetness. A perverse Fate—(surely Fate is feminine!)—decreed it so that she was either writing in her room, or reading with Ina all the afternoon.

Before dinner Alfred might have had his opportunity if he had only known it. But he was ignorant that Elma was dressed and down early, and seated reading a novel alone in the drawing-room. No little bird whispered to him that his chance was there. So she remained alone. He wondered afterwards whether she had sought to afford him an opportunity—whether as she sat alone there she was awaiting him!"

A sound of wheels made Elma look up from her book; a carriage rolled along the drive, and past the window.

"Visitors," she said to herself; "what an inopportune time for people to choose to call! It's lucky I am dressed early, so that there is somebody down to

receive them. I wonder if they have come expecting to be asked to stay to dinner."

She rose up and laid her book on the table, and cast a glance at the mirror to assure herself that her toilette and her hair were in perfect order.

She heard the sound of voices indistinctly in the hall, only two voices, the footman's and another; there was only one visitor apparently. They came nearer, and the handle of the door moved.

"What name, sir?" the footman said.

"Never mind the name," said the other voice; and hearing it now more distinctly, Elma's heart gave a sudden throb. "Absurd! impossible!" she then said to herself, but nevertheless watched with curious eagerness for the visitor as he came into the room.

He was tall and young and handsome, one of the type—

"Whose broad brow and whose curly beard,  
And manly aspect, look like Hercules."

Elma was unable to utter a word of greeting to him; her parted lips refused to frame a syllable; she stood there dumb with doubt and amazement. She was dressed in white, not transparent gauze or muslin, but some smooth opaque material falling in full and flowing folds. She looked like a marble statue as she stood motionless, the rich curtains making a background for her tall white graceful figure. She wore no colour except one deep red rose in her hair; she was pale and still with surprise, uncertainty, and half-re-

cognition, as her great dark eyes searched the stranger's face.

After the first second there was no doubt or uncertainty in the look he fixed on her, although he did not speak immediately. He came slowly nearer to her, and then smiled and held out his hand.

"It cannot be—you!" she said, half convinced by the smile and the well-remembered blue eyes, yet half incredulous still.

"Yes, it is I. Am I so changed?" he said, as he took the hand she gave.

"A little altered, of course; but not more changed than I am, I dare say," she replied, realizing as she looked in his face that her last night's "wonder" was answered, and Carlos had come back.

"You are not changed," he said gravely and gently. "And you are well?"

"Yes," she replied.

"And Elma Dalziel still?" glancing at her left hand.

"Yes."

"And more beautiful than ever," he said looking at her thoughtfully and earnestly. He had grown more like his uncle Geoffrey than he had been as a boy; the fair beard of course increased the likeness; and his boyish frank goodnature of manner had given way to something of Geoffrey's quiet gravity.

"I can scarcely yet believe it is you," she said.

"You are not sorry to see me back?" he rejoined.

"I am glad," she answered sincerely.

"I wonder if I've come too late," he observed, but more to himself than to her. "Tell me," he added, "who is here? and is Ina well?"

"Yes, pretty well; she is not very strong. All the Atherdales are here; Alfred and Lizzie, and their mother, and Dora and her husband. I must run up to Ina now, and tell her—and tell them all—that you are here."

"Must you go?"

"Yes, indeed I must," she said in her old gay voice with her brightest smile, and hurried out of the room to bear the good news.

On the staircase landing she met her sister and Dora coming down.

"What is it, Elma? who is the visitor?" asked Ina with some surprise and interest as she looked in Elma's face.

"Guess!"

"Some favourite admirer, I should guess, come down from London," said Dora.

"Come," said Elma, taking Ina's hand, "don't be startled, dearest, but try *your* hand at guessing!"

"It—it is not Carlos?" Ina rejoined, turning even paler than usual. She was not strong, and surprise or excitement made her heart beat.

"And if it were Carlos, dear, you would be glad to see him, would you not?"

"Is it he?" Ina said.

And being assured that it was, and drawing a long breath or two to get over the nervous shock any piece of news was to her now, Ina hastened gladly to greet the returned truant.

"Carlos, dear Carlos, I am so glad—so glad!" she said as she kissed him like a sister and took both his hands in hers.

"What a surprise, Carlos!" was Dora's greeting; she was smiling and bright and friendly, but a little embarrassed, and evidently quite determined to infuse no sentiment into the occasion. He for his part was equally far from infusing any into his greeting; he felt no sentiment at all save cousinly at the moment, and expressed none. At the moment, his mind full of Elma, he did not indeed remember that the last time he had seen Dora they had been betrothed. Their brief parting interview was not just then present to his mind. He knew, but he did not then reflect on, the fact that, when he had said good-bye to her, they had parted with reproaches and petulant tears on her side. He thought of it afterwards, and wondered that he had not felt more in meeting her.

The rest of the party came in. His aunt greeted him with expansion; Lizzie—in whom he scarcely recognised the child Lizzie he had known—with shy pleasure. Mr. Stebbing regarded him with some curiosity; he knew the story of Dora's early betrothal, and being eighteen years older than his pretty wife, he would not have been sorry if this handsome cousin

had elected to stay a little longer in America. Alfred met Carlos with an appearance of having "buried the past in oblivion." Carlos as he pressed Alfred's hand had really for the time forgotten the seven-years-past quarrel, and the only thing he recollected was Christine—the only thought present to his mind in meeting, was of her who should have been by Alfred's side. He said nothing of her then ; but when he was alone with Ina, talking over many things necessary to be discussed, he spoke his thought.

"There's only one thing I regret," he said. "My little sister isn't here to welcome me."

"No, Carlos dear ; there is a vacant place !"

"I wish I had said good-bye to her. I little thought when last I saw her"—he broke off abruptly.

"It was a heavy blow to us all," Ina said. "So young—so sweet and good ! We 'entertained an angel unaware.' She was fitter for the heaven where she is now, than for this world."

"Say, will you tell me one thing?" said Carlos presently, when that sad subject had been dropped. "Alfred and—your sister, are they good friends?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Are they more than friends?"

"No—oh no !" said Ina, sincerely glad to be able to answer in the negative.

"Ah ! I thought when I got the last mail from England there was maybe something up there. I fancied by some allusion you made that they might

be coming together some day. I was mistaken then?"

He did not look sorry to detect himself in a mistake. Ina was not sorry either. She had thought while Carlós was away that Elma might do as well to marry Alfred as anything else. Now she thought that Elma might do a great deal better. She felt rather guilty all the same, knowing in her heart she had lately speculated much on the chance of Elma's marrying Alfred, and looked forward to it as a rather pleasant possibility, and that now within an hour she had turned to hope earnestly that quite another state of affairs might come to pass.

"It is quite a reversal of the usual order of things for the guests to be welcoming and doing the honours to their host," she observed; a sense of the situation striking her comically as she exhibited the various rooms to Carlos, who laughed and shook his hair back in his old boyish way.

"When a fellow drops from the skies as suddenly as I did, he comes as a guest, and is very grateful when he meets with so hearty a welcome."

All the party were more or less genuinely glad to see Carlos again, with the exception of Alfred Atherdale. Mr. Stebbing decided, on further observation of his wife and his host, that there was not likely to be the slightest renewal of sentiment or flirtation between them, and became quite at ease on that score. He however felt it at first rather an awkward position to be

a guest in a house whose owner he had never seen until the said owner suddenly appearing, discovered him there. He approached the subject in conversation with Carlos, and was met by a welcoming assurance so evidently sincere and hearty, that his mind was set quite at peace on that score too.

But Alfred, as he looked towards the head of the table where Carlos sat, and listened to the merry talk and laughter, and assumed a gracious smile of pleasure at the happy occasion, felt the old "envy, hatred, and uncharitableness" rising in his breast again, and this time on double grounds. Carlos sat at the head of the table as master, and Alfred was only guest. Carlos's mere look awoke a more softly radiant smile on Elma's face than ever Alfred's most winning words had done. And in the general welcome of Carlos, Alfred felt ignored and neglected.

And one little thing—a very trifle—angered him sorely. They sat a long time over dinner and dessert ; but the evening was long enough all the same for the usual "little music" to be called for.

"What will you sing?" asked Carlos of Elma, occupying Alfred's usual post beside her as she went to the piano.

"Shall I sing your old favourite ballad 'Troy Town?'" she asked in a half-whisper, shyly casting a moment's glance at him from beneath her long lashes. He smiled and bent his head. And she smiled too, and a colour and a glow of sudden tender brightness,

and memory and joy flashed over her face ; and she sang " Troy Town " with a passion and a fervour she had never infused into that sweet mournful minor melody before. She sang the story of the " ten years' wars " with martial fire ; and sank into sweeter softness on the sad refrain—

" Waste lie those walls that were so good,  
And corn now grows where Troy Town stood."

She did not mean to hurt Alfred ; she had forgotten for the moment how he had begged her to sing that song the previous evening, and how she had refused. She was thinking only that Carlos was by her side again.

Alfred's chance was gone ; and he knew it ; and still he thought he would speak to her yet. But now in all the stir and the excitement of Carlos's return, there was no obtaining a few words alone with her. Nor had he any opportunity on the following day. The whole of the party kept together in their walks and drives ; and any chance of a tête-à-tête with Alfred, Elma now skilfully and delicately avoided without seeming to avoid.

After dinner, when the gentlemen joined the ladies who were grouped round the open windows of the drawing-room, Carlos came up to Elma and leant over her chair.

" It is a warm night," he said, " and it's so lovely in the open air. Will you take a turn in the garden with me ?"

Alfred heard, and mentally gnashed his teeth to think that he had not made this straightforward and simple move. Elma accepted the invitation, and the pair stepped out into the garden. The idea set the rest of the party moving, and others wandered into the garden too ; but no one overtook or joined Carlos and Elma. They went along the shrubbery path and out of sight and hearing of the rest. It was a still and beautiful night, the very trees seemed asleep ; the rustling of their voice was silent ; and only now and then the boughs whispered to each other, faint and low as if in a dream. A few fairy flecks of cloud, like the white distant shimmer of angels' wings, floated in the dark blue heavens. Among the stars, the pale fair flowers of night that blossom in the sky, the queen-white rose shone supreme, full blown from budding crescent to perfect sphere.

"Lovely !" said Elma, looking at the sky.

"Most lovely !" echoed Carlos, looking down at her face in the moonlight.

"Will you take my arm ?" he said gently, as if he were pleading for a favour ; and she complied with his request.

They walked on in silence a little way. Carlos looked down upon the white fingers resting on his black sleeve, and first touched them softly, and then clasped them close. The remark with which he opened the conversation was, however, far from original.

"You are not changed. Am I altered, do you think?"

"You have altered," she replied.

"For the worse?" he asked.

"No," she said briefly, in a lower voice than usual.

"I am not changed in one thing, Elma. Can you guess what that one thing is?"

Still monosyllabic, and still more softly, though this time with a distressing want of veracity, she again answered "No."

"Elma," he said quietly and earnestly, "I have never forgotten you. I said, 'Goodbye, Elma,' when I left the shores of England behind. I said, 'A day nearer to Elma,' each night as I lay down in my berth on the homeward voyage. I found you more beautiful than ever. I feared lest I might find you no longer free. But you are free, Elma?" he stopped as he spoke.

"Yes."

"And you had not quite forgotten me?"

"No. I thought sometimes I could forget you. But I never did."

"Thank you for that—bless you for that, my queen. You have been my queen in my memory all this time. My Elma, may I say *mine*?"

She was silent; her heart stood still in an intense hush of great and perfect gladness. "At last!" she thought, "at last!" but spoke no word, only nestled a little—a shade—nearer to him.

"Does silence mean Yes?" he whispered very softly.

"Ycs."

The moon looked down coldly and gently and passionlessly upon them, as he set his first kiss upon her lips. How many such kisses had that pallidly shining moon witnessed between the crescent and the full! how many passions, and how many tears! But her calm light did not chill these two passionate hearts with the inexorable lesson she held above them! The lesson of the laws of Change—the evanescence of our joys and sorrows—the poor and pitiful vanity of our futile struggles with our fate—fell unheeded upon them. Love never heeds nor learns that lesson until it is forced by Time. And that is well for Love! If with each long look of loving eyes came the foreshadowed bitterness of the tears those eyes would one day shed—if with each kiss came the knowledge of the price that Fate exacts must be paid for earthly bliss—Love would not be what it is, well worth its cost!





## CHAPTER XXIII.

### ENVY, HATRED, AND MALICE.

L'avenir ! l'avenir ! mystère !  
Toutes les choses de la terre,  
Victoire aux ailes embrasées,  
Ambitions réalisées,  
Ne sont jamais sur nous posés  
Que comme l'oiseau sur nos toits !  
Nul ne peut avant l'heure  
Ouvrir ta froide main !  
O fantôme muet ! ô notre ombre,  
O notre hôte !  
Spectre toujours masqué qui nous suit,  
côte à côte,  
Et qu'on nomme Demain !

—*Victor Hugo.*



WHEN Elma arose next morning, it seemed a new world of beauty on which she looked. There was a new music in the blackbird's jubilant morning song—a new fragrance in the climbing honeysuckle that wafted its sweetness up to her window. Never, it seemed to her, had the June sun smiled so joyously on the grounds of Saxby Towers, nor bathed the harmonizing greens of turf and tree in

so golden a flood of light. She had seen "full many a glorious morning!" but surely never one like this.

And surely, too, her own face, as she looked upon it in the mirror, had never looked so fair. She gazed at herself dreamily, lingeringly.

How much more precious her always-valued beauty has suddenly become to her! now that it is his, and hers only to guard and cherish for his sake! For Elma, with all her past seasons of frivolous flirtations and idle coquetries, flung behind her for ever and forgotten, is as deeply and romantically in love now as ever girl or woman was.

"Is it a dream?" she thinks, hardly able to realize her happiness yet. "I've no tangible proof yet that it is true. Ah, when I see him—then—then I shall know it was no dream! And to think what I *might* have been mad enough to do, if he had not come back to me! To think that I might have been weak enough and wicked enough to sign away my future while *he* lived and was free! Oh how I might have been punished! What agony I have escaped! Thank heaven for my great happiness! and heaven help me to make *him* happy always!"

Kneeling by her bedside, with the early sunshine gilding her bright hair, and the divine light that only love can give glorifying her lovely face, Elma clasped her hands in the earnest thanksgivings that rose from her heart.

Then she went downstairs to meet the rest of the

party at the breakfast-table, where her blushes, and Carlos's looks, and their mutual assumption of unusual equanimity, soon enlightened such members of the family as were yet in ignorance concerning the new state of affairs. With Ina of course Elma had had a confidential interview on the previous night; but the news had not, as is sometimes the case, been telegraphed to every one of the circle.

Perhaps nobody was surprised to learn that Carlos and Elma had agreed to link their lives together. Perhaps also nobody—save one—was displeased. Alfred's pale handsome face turned a little paler than usual when he heard that their engagement was no longer a possibility of the future, but a fact of the present; but he was not surprised. He had watched Elma's looks since Carlos's return, and was forewarned and fore-armed against the news. Yet under the external armour of coolness and indifference, the wound stung and smarted bitterly. In his heart he wished the vessel that brought his cousin over had been wrecked before ever it sighted land, and that the rival who had distanced him were lying cold beneath the waves, and safe out of his way for ever. But his were the only uttered good wishes which were not sincere.

Dora, once the fiancée of Carlos herself, naturally did not feel much flattered by this most convincing proof that he had not the remotest idea of wearing the willow for *her*, and that her presence had not in the least revived the old boyish attachment; that in fact

he had "got over" their parting as completely as she had. Still as she was absorbed in her dear Samuel and their wonderfully-precocious son and heir, she supported the trial of seeing her former lover finding comfort elsewhere with virtuous equanimity.

Lizzie Atherdale, who admired Elma sincerely, was pleased and interested; her mother also smiled upon the engagement; she had never been especially eager to have Elma for a daughter-in-law, nor did she know how deeply her dear son's feelings were engaged in the matter. And, as she observed to her daughters, it was very much better that Carlos should marry an English girl, and one of their own circle too, than if he had made his choice in America, and brought a stranger home to Saxby Towers.

As for Ina Atherdale, she was of course delighted, and felt that she had nothing more to wish for in this world.

"There is no one—no one on the face of the earth, dearest Carlos," she said, "to whom I could so gladly trust my sister as to you. Ah! do you know, I have always thought that if this would come to pass I should have no other dream to be fulfilled!"

"You must make up some other wish now that we have obligingly gratified this one," said Carlos gaily; while Elma smiled up at him, and knelt down softly by her sister's side.

"You really think," Carlos added more thoughtfully, indeed appealing quite earnestly to Ina, "you really

think she'll be happy with me? She thinks so now, of course. And I don't see any stumbling-blocks in the way; the road looks all clear. *You?* you think so too, Ina?"

"I think so too, indeed," Ina replied as earnestly, but looking puzzled at his tone. "Why should you think of stumbling-blocks, Carlos dear?" she added, putting the question in words that Elma's eyes were asking.

"Why? Well, only because it seems too good to be true, I suppose!" he said, the shade of anxious thoughtfulness melting away.

He did not seem to doubt his powers of making Elma happy any more. And to any one who saw the two together, if only for half an hour, it would have seemed indeed as absurd and groundless a doubt as ever entered a lover's brain; for they were evidently, openly, perfectly, and utterly happy during those early days of golden June. Whatever other *affaires de cœur* they had played at or participated in, this was to them both the first and only real love. Elma indeed had never known in all her life (wherein flirtation and romance had played so large a part) the lightest pulsation of love for any man but this one from whom, when he was a boy, she had parted with pain, whom she had thought utterly gone and lost to her for ever, and who now had come back to be her very own at last. She felt as if the years of her youth, and the bloom of her beauty, had all been

wasted hitherto, until this crown was set upon her life.

"La beauté c'est le front,  
L'Amour c'est la couronne."

Carlos was an ideal lover to her, more, far more indeed than the ideal lover of her girlish dreams. There was in him a romantic tenderness and a deferential gentleness that seemed a relic of the old idealised days of chivalry; there was a manly strength; there was an almost boyish straightforwardness and simplicity. And mixed and mingled with all these, there flashed out glimpses of a passion which revealed that the blood of the ardent Southern race of which his father's mother came, ran strong and burning in his veins. He had inherited some of the Ximenez nature as well as one of the family Christian names, from Dolores Ximenez. Of that black-haired, brilliant-eyed, olive-skinned, dangerous beauty, from a Transatlantic Spanish colony, whom an Atherdale had ventured to plant in his English home, some of the fire and fervour survived in the fair-haired, blue-eyed son of the Atherdales who now possessed Saxby Towers.

He had, too, the habits of thought natural to one born and partly bred in the wild West when life there was wild and rough indeed; when women were few and far between, and not all of these the best of their sex.

All these influences had done their share in the

moulding and modelling of Carlos Atherdale's character. He loved with the passion of his Southern blood, with the tenderness of his chivalrous and kindly nature, with the reverence of one who had learnt as a boy to look upon pure true womanhood as one of the divinest of God's gifts to earth, and who, as a man, never unlearned that lesson.

Looking on their happiness, uttering his congratulations duly with the rest, was one whose heart was boiling with envy, jealousy, and wrath, the bitterer because they were stifled and suppressed. Alfred saw the woman he loved with the imperious and engrossing passion of a nature selfish, but not cold, taken from him—just as he began to be hopeful and sure of winning her—by the rival who had years before stepped in and taken, by some fraud or meanness, Alfred firmly believed, the heritage on which he himself had set his heart. But his envious jealousy was silent; and all around him words of pleasure and hope and felicitation were spoken aloud.

Mr. Stebbing and Dora left Saxby Towers in the course of a few days. It was arranged that Carlos and Alfred were to drive with them to the station, and having seen them off, were to pay a visit to Dr. Haynes, who had moved to a house nearer the station than his former villa. The carriage was not to wait for Alfred and Carlos, who could walk home, but to pick up Mrs. Atherdale and Lizzie, and convey them for a drive and some visits. Ina and Elma were to accompany them

if the former felt well enough. But Elma shook her head doubtfully as she said good-bye to Carlos.

"I don't think Ina ought to be out this afternoon. We two shall be pretty sure to stay at home ; so you will not stay out very long, will you ? You will come back to me as soon as you are able ?" She was looking at him with eyes that spoke very plainly, and persuaded far more eloquently than her words. And his answering look spoke plainer still.

"I'll come back," he said, feeling at that minute that it was really an outrage upon his feelings that he should have to go at all, and that at any rate he wished they had contrived to say good-bye—(such a long good-bye, for three whole hours !) elsewhere than upon the public doorstep. His hand rested accidentally on her shoulder, lingering and loth to leave. He must go ; yet stay ! There was a stray tress of hair to be put back from her forehead ; he must smooth it into its place. And then, of course, a gentleman must shake hands with a lady at parting, if for ever so short a time ! and he need not be in too great a hurry to let go of the soft warm hand.

All this Alfred watched with jealousy burning at his heart, and the mad impulse to snatch her away from Carlos, or dash Carlos away from her, stirring his every nerve. But all that *they* saw of him, all in fact that any one saw, was an attentive brother gravely handing Dora to the carriage, and holding her bag and parasol while she stepped in.

They drove to the station and went on to Dr. Haynes's, as had been arranged. The doctor had a friend down from London that day; and Alfred and Carlos stayed to lunch, and so made a social quartette. Carlos, who was in high spirits and very favourably regarded and warmly welcomed by old Dr. Haynes, communicated to him the prospect of his marriage. The old doctor was delighted; he knew and liked Elma Dalziel, and was sure that no more charming lady could have been chosen to be mistress of Saxby Towers. He broached a bottle of his best champagne on the occasion, and congratulated Carlos warmly on the charms of his affianced bride.

Alfred noted the friendship and attention bestowed on Carlos, and inwardly begrudged it. In his eyes it was only as the owner of Saxby Towers, and not as Carlos Atherdale, that his cousin was so welcomed and favoured. At lunch the conversation happened to turn on opiates and narcotics, old and new; their uses and abuses, and Alfred took pleasure in reflecting that the topic must be unpleasant to Carlos, as recalling his uncle's death, and endeavoured, without seeming to do so, to prolong the conversation. But Dr. Haynes was of quite an opposite mind; Carlos was an old favourite of his, and was not to be disturbed by any reference to the anxious time of Geoffrey's death. So the host threw cold water on the subject and it dropped. But the champagne went round, and other wine followed it, and Alfred Atherdale's pulses were

quickenings their beat, and his jealousy aggravated by every cordial and congratulatory word bestowed on Carlos.

The two young men walked home by one of the prettiest roads in the neighbourhood, which wound along the hills and skirted the brow of the White Slip, as a smooth-surfaced steep chalk cliff, where a landslip once had been, was named.

It was a fine breezy day. Carlos Atherdale always exulted in sunshine and bright windy weather. As he walked on, with his free long swinging step, tall, erect, and in face and figure alike a splendid specimen of manhood, Alfred looked at him under his brows with malevolent eyes. He hated him for his handsome face and fine physique—for his careless confidence of air and mien—for his good fortune in the present possession of Saxby Towers, and the future possession of Elma Dalziel. He hated him so that he dropped the mask of friendliness—a thin mask at the best of times, for they had never been really friends, and lately there had always been a restraint between them.

"You are a great favourite with Dr. Haynes," he said.

"Am I?" rejoined Carlos, looking round curiously, for Alfred's *tone* had contained a soupçon of unpleasantness totally superfluous and incomprehensible in so simple a remark as his mere *words* composed.

"Oh yes. You were born under a lucky star. Another man in your place would have fallen under a

slur which you have escaped," said Alfred deliberately and bitterly, looking aside and switching the wayside weeds with a light cane he carried.

"What slur?"

"Another man in your place would have failed in some point in the game you played, nor would the Fates have helped another as they have helped you. Yes, Dr. Haynes likes you. Is he as genuinely unsuspicious as he seems? Why did he change the conversation to-day when it turned on the use and abuse of narcotics? He is considerate of your feelings evidently."

"Do you allude to that subject which I thought buried and forgotten?" asked Carlos, looking him straight in the face.

"I allude to that persuasion of mine which may have been buried and silenced, but never extinct, never forgotten. Can I forget it when I see you holding the place which ought to have been mine—the place for which you played your game, and won!"

"And can I forget it," said Carlos suddenly, "when to the very borders of the Pacific your vile slander followed me! Do you know that there, four years after I turned my back on the Towers and all belonging to it, that old taint of calumny I thought I had left far behind me, showed its serpent head again? Out from this little village of Saxby away to the furthest West, it had crept after me. I took up a petty paper one day—whose editor hated me. There

the old poison oozed out of a few cowardly hinted words they did not dare speak plain ! ”

“ Well ? ”

“ Well, that editor kept his room for a week after my horsewhip curled round his shoulders. His chum had a shot at me in the saloon next day, but his aim wasn't anything to speak of. I took care the papers reporting it shouldn't get to England if I could help it. After that little episode had blown over I heard no more of it.”

“ Your cursed luck in everything,” muttered Alfred moodily, wishing the shot had been sent with a deadlier aim. He was incapable in his calmer moments of inflicting bodily harm on any one ; he was incapable at all times of laying a deliberate plan to assault or injure ; but at that moment he was boiling with a long pent-up hate and jealousy (further excited by the fumes of wine) that would have shrunk from no violence, had he had any weapon at hand. But he knew he had no chance in a personal encounter with his cousin. Carlos was much the stronger of the two. Alfred's light stick was next to nothing as either offence or defence. They were now on the homeward road at a part where the chalk cliff was steepest, and where there was no protecting pale.

The sloping landscape lay bathed in sunshine below them to their left. To the right the rugged bank sloped gradually up to a crown of fir-trees. It was a pretty scene, but they were in no state of mind to be

softened or attracted by summer sunshine and whispering green leaves.

"Your cursed luck!" repeated Alfred. "The place that would have been all to me, and that you, having gained, have thrown by and neglected, you have played your game for and won. You practised on my uncle with your professed devotion. You were alone with him when he drank the overdose that, by the admission of both doctors, hastened his death. There is mystery about the paper my own eyes saw him entrust freshly sealed to your care, and which was never after to be found, and whose purport you are unable to explain. Until that mystery is cleared up by you, I hold and believe that you gained possession of Saxby Towers by concealment and crime."

"Is that enough?" asked Carlos, fixing on his cousin a stern and scornful look, but keeping in command the temper that in the old days had blazed up at a less plain-spoken accusation. It was Alfred now whose temper had broken loose from his own control.

"No, it is *not* enough!" he said. "To crown all, and as the culminating point, you have won away from me the woman who in a few days would—should—must have been promised and bound to *me*."

"Would she so?" asked the other, rather self-congratulatorily and thoughtfully than jealously.

"You came and took her from me ; you, who will marry her with a secret and a shame, and keep your sinful secret, whatever it is, for that it exists you cannot even deny, hidden out of her sight."

"What I confide to her, and what I conceal from her, concerns only her and me. She does not need your championship."

"If you had come but three days later I would have met you with the right of her guardianship. It would have been *you* whose championship would not have been needed. You should have found her mine !"

"Three days later?" said Carlos. "Then blessings on the good west wind that speeded the Java on her way across the Atlantic ! I was well in time !"

"You exult before me !" exclaimed Alfred, all his blood boiling at his rival's triumph, and his fingers clutching nervously and threateningly upon the stick he carried.

Carlos glanced down at the cane, and laughed with a little ungenerous triumph in his superior strength.

"You had better keep quiet, and not let me see you lift that," he said.

Alfred turned upon him with such a flash of animal hate and fury in his look that Carlos simply caught the stick from his hand, snapped it in two, and flung it away over the cliff. The very carelessness and confidence of his action as he tossed it away from him

placed him off his guard for just one second. That second's carelessness cost them both dear. In that one second Alfred, too literally mad to think of consequences, sprang upon him. Carlos—his back half turned to Alfred,—was off guard and open to attack, as the fragments of the stick whirled from his hand over the cliff.

"Go after it! Fetch it me back!" cried Alfred in a hoarse voice unlike his own.

The next minute he stood on the brink of the chalk cliff alone, with a horrible cold dread seizing his heart in an icy grasp, and the dull, crushing, smothered sound of a fall still in his ears, "clear as thunder," though all was silent now. His blood seemed to freeze within his veins; he dared not look around him; he dared not cast one glance below. He stood dumb and powerless for a minute; then the thought flashed across him, "*Had any one seen?*"

He looked round shudderingly. No one on the white road before; no one on the white road behind; not a living soul in sight in the field; not a human voice to be heard in the wood.

Then the instinct of self-preservation sprang into life, and took possession of him. Carlos might be killed. He, Alfred, might be guilty of murder. But who was to prove it? Who was to bear witness that it was no accident?

He tried to collect his ideas, to gather his strength to face the dreadful position. His first collected

thought was this : What would an innocent man do in seeing another precipitated by accident down a cliff? For whatever an innocent man would do, *he* must do, in order to keep up the appearance of innocence then and thereafter. He must make his way to Carlos first thing, and ascertain—what had happened ! It was horrible ; it was awful ; he felt for a moment a mad impulse to end his own torture of dread and suspense by throwing himself down too. Then the strange self-possession that is often born of desperation came to his assistance. He hurried to the nearest spot where a descent was practicable. More rapidly and recklessly than seemed possible to a man of his ordinarily cautious and leisurely movements, he half crawled, half climbed, by a rough track down the surface of the cliff. He gained the lower ground, and went, with limbs that shook beneath him, to the place where Carlos lay.

How fearfully motionless was that prostrate figure, half heaped together as it had fallen ! How awful was its stillness ! *Would it ever move again?* His face was half hidden on the ground, and one hand outstretched clutched a tuft of grass as if with the last act of consciousness.

Alfred staggered to him, and knelt shrinkingly by his side. He could not speak ; his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He forced himself to touch him—to raise his head, and lift him from the ground.

Was it murder? Was the brand of Cain upon his brow?

Oh, God be thanked ! not killed ! not dead ! Life in the heart—life in the pulse—life in a faint reviving breath !





## CHAPTER XXIV.

YOU THINK I'M GOING TO TELL ?

“ *Who* did this, Wolfram ?”

“ *Thou* know'st, Melveric !

At the last day reply thou to such question

When such an angel asks it. I'll not answer,

Or then or now !”

—*Beddoes.*

**I**NA ATHERDADE was lying on a sofa in her room ; “ she was not ill,” she protested, “ only tired.” And yet she had been doing nothing to fatigue her. Beside her Elma was sitting in a reverie. She had been reading aloud to her sister, but the poem was finished now ; the book lay closed ; and she had drifted into a silent day-dream of love and happiness.

Ina looked up and watched her sister's absorbed and radiant face with a tender half smile, half sigh.

“ Are you happy, Elma ?” she asked presently.

Elma awoke from her day-dream and knelt down by Ina's side caressingly.

“ Very, very happy !” she answered ; her eyes illumined with the perfect joy that is serene and tran-

quail through its very intensity, calm as great deep waters.

"Who would have thought, Elma, that *you* were capable of being so deeply in love?" her sister observed. "Even *I* scarcely expected it of you."

"I don't think I should have been capable of loving anybody else," Elma replied laughingly. "But you see, Carlos—well, Carlos is Carlos! I think, Ina, that I was always a little bit in love with him, even from the very first."

"I think you were. And then you might have been together all these years!" pondered Ina.

"Better late than never! And we don't feel quite old yet. His hair is not beginning to get thin on the top, and I can see without spectacles still. And I think," she added more gravely, "that all these years that have past, and that have changed us from boy and girl to man and woman, and during which we have remembered each other so faithfully, will help to make us the dearer to one another now."

"Ah, I am glad to see you so happy, my darling! God grant you a happier life than mine has been! Though I should do ill to complain. Like Schiller's Thekla,

'Ich habe genossen das Irdische glück  
Ich habe gelebt und geliebet.'

But I pray that you, Elma, may know a whole life of love, and never a loss like mine!"

"Amen, dear Ina! I was never as good as you,

and never merited as much. But I shall be good and unselfish and gentle *now*. Love will make me all that you are, and that you did not need love to make you. *I* need it ! And now for his sake, and through him, I shall be better than ever I was in my life before !”

“You were always a good and sweet little sister to me. I do not know how I shall bear to part with you now.”

“But we are not going to part,” replied Elma, smiling at the very idea of parting. “You and Carlos and I are one ; we are going to be a sort of shamrock leaf, three in one ! a happy family of three.”

“He is very good. Carlos was always very dear to me. You are a fortunate girl, Elma !”

“I am !” said Elma gladly and proudly.

“I wonder if they will soon be home,” observed Ina.

“Not just yet, I should think,” said Elma, rising up and going towards the window nevertheless.

She stood idly playing with the tassel of the blind and looking out. Presently a light vehicle came along the drive, and stopped at the hall door. It had been half hidden by the bushes ; but when it stopped Elma saw that something--somebody--what was it ?—was lying across the seat of the pony-chaise and being lifted out. A sudden fear struck her ; she leant forward and strained her eyes to see. She recognised that it was Dr. Haynes's pony-chaise ; it was surely Dr. Haynes of whom she caught a glimpse before he

disappeared into the portico ; one of the other figures seemed to be Alfred's ; and he whom they were lifting, and who let them lift him so passively—no ! it could not, it could *not* be Carlos ! She uttered a faint gasp of breathless terror and anguish, and pressed her hand to her heart.

"What is it, dear ?" asked Ina ; who, lying on her sofa at the other side of the room, had not noticed the sound of the light wheels of the little chaise.

"Ina must not be frightened ! a shock is dangerous for her," thought Elma, in the midst of her terror, with an unselfish consideration for her sister.

"It's not much. I have such a dreadful pain in my side," she answered, and her sudden pallor and breathlessness looked indeed like physical pain. "I can scarcely breathe. Lie still, dear ! only a spasm—it will pass ; don't move—I—I—think I'll go to my room."

Ina rose up from her cushions with anxious inquiries.

"Oh, lie still, Ina ! I don't *want* any one with me !" exclaimed Elma with the petulance of agony in her tone, and hurried from the room.

She went downstairs breathlessly, quickly, yet dreading to hasten too much, not knowing on what she might be hastening. Her heart beat like a steam-hammer ; her hand clasped the baluster convulsively. She heard a murmuring of whispered voices ; she reached the last turn of the stairs, and saw the hall.

Three or four men stood or knelt there, bending over one who lay still on one of the tigerskin mats.

Oh, there was no mistake ! It *was* Alfred, who stood erect and unhurt ; it *was* Carlos who lay there. Elma's heart stopped beating ; she felt giddy and clung to the baluster, but went on towards them still.

They saw her coming ; they looked at her with evident dismay and embarrassment. Dr. Haynes came towards her as if to intercept her. She was white to the very lips, but she stood steady and erect. Quietly, and without a word, she put out her hand with a pleading, and insisting gesture, that said, " Let me pass ! "

" My dear Miss Dalziel, do not be alarmed ! " said Dr. Haynes, taking prisoner the extended hand, and interposing himself between her and Carlos still.

" What is it ? " she asked in a whisper.

" He has had a fall ; rather a serious fall ; but you need not alarm yourself ; I hope he will do very well."

" Let me go to him," was all her answer ; but the doctor held her hand and detained her.

" There would be no use in your speaking to him, my dear young lady ; he could not answer you just now."

" Is—is he not conscious ? " she asked in a shuddering whisper.

" Not at present. He fainted as we lifted him out

of the chaise. It is only a swoon from pain and exhaustion."

"I will not speak, nor be in your way at all. You may trust me. You must let me pass, please!" she said, quite calmly now, but with a wild gleam of resolution in her eyes, that told him she had better have her own way.

She went to Carlos, and knelt softly and silently down by his side, and took his passive hand lightly in hers, without a cry or a tear. Only her eyes fixed upon his face with a love and tenderness and yearning beyond all words. His eyes were closed, and a few drops of blood were trickling still from a cut on his forehead just under his fair curling hair."

"That cut is nothing; it will heal in two days," said the good doctor comfortingly. Elma scarcely seemed to hear him.

"My Carlos, my own!" she murmured almost inaudibly, gazing at him as though her intense gaze could call him back to consciousness.

"We must take him to his room now. And we must not startle your sister," Dr. Haynes continued.

Elma heard and appreciated these last remarks. Her eyes dwelling on Carlos still, she rose up reluctantly and lingeringly from his side.

"I will go to my sister," she said. "And *you* will take care of *him*?" She pressed the doctor's hand almost convulsively, and turned to re-cross the hall—turned in time to see her sister standing on the lowest

turn of the great staircase looking at the group. Elma hastened to support and re-assure her, to entreat her not to be agitated and to return to her room. Ina, pale as death and trembling like an aspen-leaf, passively permitted Elma to half lead and half carry her back to her room, where she sank down fainting, as lately she had done once or twice at far slighter shocks than this.

Divided between a greater and a less anxiety, Elma laid her sister on the sofa, flew to the staircase to hear how matters were progressing in the hall, and flew back to her sister to help revive her.

The lady's-maid came to attend on Ina; the doctor and servants were with Carlos. Torn by distracting anxiety, Elma listened breathlessly for every sound, strained her ear to catch every voice or footstep, yet forced herself to remain at her sister's side while they carried Carlos to his room, and forced herself too, when Ina came to her senses, to assume a hopeful and soothing air, and comfort her with the assurance that he was in no danger.

When the doctor was at liberty to speak to Elma, and make his report to her—for of course she would see him alone before she allowed Ina to hear any account from him—she controlled her agony of anxiety; knowing well that every sign of agitation would lessen her chance of hearing the whole truth; and questioned him calmly and earnestly, with a confiding friendly air.

"Now tell me how it happened? How? Where?"

"Mr. Atherdale and his cousin had left my house, intending to walk home," said Dr. Haynes. "I was just going out on my round, and my little trap was at the door, when a man galloped up to tell me that Mr. Atherdale had fallen over by the White Slip, and they were carrying him home to Saxby Towers, and would I follow? Of course I whipped up my pony, drove fast, and overtook them, had him laid as carefully as possible in my vehicle, and came on here with my man Robert, and Mr. Alfred Atherdale."

"Is he much hurt?" she asked, her voice quivering in spite of her effort to be quite calm.

"There is no present danger, my dear lady, I can conscientiously assure you. I see no reason as yet why he should not do very well."

"Thank God!" she murmured devoutly. "But tell me, Dr. Haynes, what is it? Is there—any limb broken?"

"No. There is an injury to the hip, which we will hope may not cause any permanent lameness. And there are two ribs rather badly broken, I am sorry to say. The fall you see is a severe one, and we may well be thankful that things are no worse."

"We may indeed!" she said shuddering. "But how could he have fallen?"

"When he came to himself the first time, he said something about throwing a stick; and Mr. Alfred Atherdale gives us to understand that in reaching after

it he overbalanced himself. The path is really a dangerous one since the landslip; it is almost a wonder no accident has ever happened before."

As the doctor was departing, Elma caught his hand in both hers.

"Dear Dr. Haynes, I may rely on you, may I not? You will not keep back any of the truth from me? You will let me know all?" she said in the most entreating of her earnest tones.

"I have kept back nothing," he assured her. "I cannot answer at present how things will go; but there is certainly no immediate danger."

"I may see him of course?" she said.

The doctor looked doubtful. "He must not be agitated."

"He shall not be. You see, doctor, that you may quite trust me to keep calm. I will not even speak to him without permission. But I must see him."

Here a rustling of dresses was heard in the passage, and Mrs. Atherdale and Lizzie appeared, both agitated and in tears, having just heard of the mishap that had befallen.

They thought Elma's calmness wonderful, and betokening some want of natural feeling. They went to Ina, and wept with her, and alarmed and distressed her further than before by their tearful sympathies. And they slept that night well nevertheless, though they were sincerely sorry for Carlos. Elma sat up late soothing her sister to sleep; and when Ina slept,

and not till then, stole softly back to her own room. Then she threw herself dressed upon her bed, and lay sleepless and weeping all the night long, giving free way to the grief she had kept from such natural expression all day, whispering to herself with an anguish of tenderness and yearning, "Oh, my Carlos! my Carlos!" as she watched the slow dawn brighten, her eyes heavy and dim with tears.

To Alfred Atherdale she had simply never given a thought from the moment she had seen that he was safe and Carlos hurt. She was so wholly absorbed in thoughts of Carlos, that—although she could still remember to care for her sister—no thought of any one else had even entered her brain. He filled her mind, to the utter exclusion of every other idea.

Yet if human suffering have a claim on human sympathy, perhaps Alfred Atherdale deserved sympathy that night.

He had escaped, for the time at least, the danger whose imminence had frozen his veins with horror. He had done no murder, and he was evidently not suspected. But who could tell how soon Carlos might not relate the whole story? Who could answer that he might not yet die of the injuries he had received? True, the few articulate words he had spoken had given no clue to the truth, and thrown no accusation on Alfred; true that the doctor said there was no present fear for his life. But what might not the next few days bring forth?

The next day brought an ordeal for Alfred which amongst his fears and anticipations he had forgotten to anticipate, or at least had not expected to occur so soon. Carlos, who had refused to see any one, even Ina, all the morning, in the afternoon, when the doctor had left, sent a request for Alfred to come to him.

Old Forester, who was installed as chief attendant—(for none of the Atherdales cared for hired nurses in a case where members of the household were competent and willing to give all requisite attention)—ushered Alfred into the room. At a sign from Carlos, Forester then retired, and left the two alone.

In Carlos, as he lay there, the likeness to Geoffrey was startling now. The dark hollows round the eyes, the contraction of pain on the brow, the pallor, the general look of unspoken suffering, completed the resemblance that had always to some extent existed.

Alfred stood by the bedside with a rush of conflicting feelings surging in his brain. Horror at what he had so narrowly escaped doing—genuine regret for what he had done—selfish regret for his own sake—fear of what Carlos might have to say to him—a struggling hope, of which he was secretly ashamed, that the secret might be kept between them—all these feelings had a share in the confusion of his mind and held him silent. Carlos did not speak either, but looked at him. With the eyes of the man of whose death he had barely escaped the guilt, upon him—with the sight of the suffering which he, who hated

the sight of all physical calamity, had inflicted, before him, Alfred felt his nerves giving way. He could not meet that look ; he averted his eyes, and suddenly hid his face in his hands.

"Don't fear," said Carlos then. "I don't think I'll die this time. And what's done can't be undone."

"The worse for me ! I would undo it if I could," muttered Alfred painfully. And then, gathering his forces for the battle, the ice being broken by exchange of words, he went on :

"Carlos, why not spare me this ? Your statement can be as well made without this interview with me. Why delay that statement ? Call in the household and tell them—all that—that happened yesterday. What can you have to say to *me* ?"

"Tell them all that happened," repeated Carlos. "So you think I'm going to *tell* ?"

Alfred bent his head assentingly ; but his heart swelled with a great relief.

"And then, what is to follow my telling ?" went on Carlos.

"The natural consequences ; the law will take the matter into its own hands," Alfred replied, with a sort of forced stoicism.

"You might know me better than that," his cousin rejoined. "What compensation would it be to me to drag the name we both bear through the mud of the public law-courts ? Where would be the satisfaction

of grieving and hurting your mother and your little sisters—who threw their pretty peaceful home open to me, and made it like *my* home, years ago ? ”

“What is it then you mean to do ? ”

“To leave unsaid whatever connects you with the accident, which no one will ever know but *as* an accident. And to caution you to be careful and keep it safe and secret too. Do you think I’d deliberately revenge myself on you for what I believe to be unpremeditated ? Even then I don’t think I could do it, remembering Christine. But I know it was an impulse—an outburst. You did not plan it cowardly beforehand.”

“Carlos, spare me ! ” said Alfred in a choked voice, mentally writhing under coals of fire ; even his great relief at the assurance of secrecy subservient now to a burning shame and suffering. The allusion to Christine—the outspoken confidence that he had “not planned cowardly”—were more than he could stand.

The sight of his emotion touched Carlos as only a generous, chivalrous, impulsive nature can be touched by the sight of remorse or self-reproach. In that moment he freely forgave Alfred from his heart, which until then he had not done, although from the first he had resolved to take no reprisals.

“There, Alfred, there ! we’ll say no more. Come ! this is done with and put away. I shall get over it, I think. Whether I do or don’t no one will ever hear a

word from me. And I say to you now, and I never say it that I don't *mean* it—shake hands.”

Alfred gave his hand, it was cold and trembling, and he could not speak. He wanted to utter some word of repentance, to say even the simple word “Forgive,” but it stuck in his throat. It was surely not in that moment an obstinate pride, or an unconquerable self-consideration, but a mere physical inability that kept him silent. He tried to break the silence, but in vain. He bit his lip to keep down his agitation ; and withdrawing his hand almost abruptly from Carlos, he took a turn up and down the room to master himself.

“Carlos,” he said unsteadily at last, “I have no words—to express——”

“There are none needed. But call Forester to me now,” said Carlos, more faintly than before, his voice changing, as he turned restlessly and painfully on the pillow.

The evident suffering legible on his troubled features, was reflected in a look of sore distress on Alfred's face.

“If my life could undo what a moment of madness did, I'd give it freely,” he said.





## CHAPTER XXV.

### THROUGH DARK TO DAWN.

I am come near  
The crown o' this steep earth. My feet shall stand  
Cold in the western shadow ; but my brow  
Lives in the living light.—*Sydney Dobell.*

**I**N that afternoon Carlos grew rapidly worse, and for the next few days lay in great suffering and danger. Inflammation had set in, and it was doubtful whether his fine constitution and hitherto vigorous health would suffice to carry him through the trial. Dr. Haynes was in constant attendance ; other advice was sought also by his desire ; and skilful surgery did all that could be done.

Elma watched the coming and going of the doctors with sickening anxiety, and hung upon their words as if her destiny spoke in them. Restless with haunting fears, and wild with suspense as she was, she yet endeavoured all she could to shield her sister from the terrors that assailed herself. She deprived herself of the poor solace, which sharing her suffering with Ina would have been, for Ina's sake. For it *is* a solace to

the most unselfish nature to feel that it does not grieve alone. Elma kept her prayerful hopes for her sister's ear, her tears and terrors for her own hours of solitude.

So Ina, although she was sorely troubled and nervous and agitated, never knew to the full extent through what peril Carlos passed during the struggle of those few anxious days that seemed like weeks. While that struggle lasted, while the chances of death or recovery swayed in the balance, Alfred Atherdale stayed on at Saxby Towers, restless and miserable, and suffering between remorse and alarm, as keenly, perhaps, as any one there. When, however, it was pronounced that the danger had been tided over, and that now a couple of months of lying quiet and constant care, would restore Carlos to his place in the household, then Alfred packed his portmanteau.

He had passed through a fiery ordeal whose traces could never be quite effaced. In some things it had been a purifying fire to him, inasmuch as it had purged hatred, malice, and jealousy clean away. He resolved—and felt himself atoning for his sin and meriting absolution as he so resolved—that he would never breathe another word upon the subject of Geoffrey's will and Carlos's disputed inheritance. And it was pleasant to him to think that this was generous in him. It seemed to set him and Carlos on a level of mutual generosity and forbearance; although he admitted, while Carlos struggled through those torturing

days of pain and danger, that Carlos had the most to forgive.

And he congratulated himself with devout and sincere fervour that his cousin lived and would recover. For if he had died, Alfred felt that, even had he remained unsuspected and unaccused, a curse would have fallen on his life and smitten out of it all possibilities of peace and joy. Alfred Atherdale was not of the stuff of which great criminals are made. He might inflict any injury in a moment of passion ; he might nurse angry and malevolent feelings till they grew to be giants ; he always did and always would rate his own personal satisfaction higher than anything else in the world. But he was incapable of deliberately planning and carrying out a scheme of crime ; nor could he look unmoved and exulting on injury he had done. From the moment he had seen Carlos lying prostrate and insensible at his feet, he had bitterly repented his work—repented it perhaps more on the score of the suffering he felt himself than of that which he had inflicted, but repented and regretted it sincerely nevertheless.

He went to say good-bye to Carlos before he left the Towers, although the interview was one he would willingly have escaped ; and he was thankful that it could only be of a few minutes' duration, as it had been postponed to the last moment possible.

"So you're off to-day," Carlos said, his voice weakened by the utter exhaustion of successive wake-

ful nights of pain ; but in his manner he was his old self again, calm and cheerful, though perhaps his greeting was neither in look nor tone expressive of actual friendship. This, however freely he might forgive and forget, was scarcely indeed to be expected.

"Yes, I am going. I came to say good-bye. I came to say more than that. I will not wander into many words about it, Carlos—I simply say, 'I thank you !' And now for my part also, the past shall be buried in oblivion. No allusion shall ever be heard from my lips to any portion of the past again."

"Nor from mine," the other agreed.

"The past, both as it concerns me, and as it concerns you," continued Alfred, "I am only anxious to bury and forget. Shall we alike agree to bury it now and here?" It was a soothing unction to his soul to thus imply that they both had something to bury in oblivion, and each a secret of the other's to keep.

"For my part, I've buried it already," responded Carlos ; "nor, if you had not alluded to it now, would you ever have heard a word of it again."

"Alfred, my dear boy, the carriage is at the door," said Mrs. Atherdale entering the room.

"Carlos, good-bye !" said Alfred earnestly, comprising a great deal in those two words.

Carlos stretched out his hand. It had wasted and grown so thin it seemed mere skin and bone ; and Alfred noticed this.

"You *are* better ? you are really better ?" he said

with a tone of anxiety, that had in it something more resembling affection than he had ever manifested to Carlos in all their lives before.

"Yes, I'll be well soon—well enough, that is!" Carlos replied gently, with an honest reassuring smile. "Don't doubt that I am getting on all right ; and now—good-bye."

So, with an undertone of consciousness that this was a real parting, in their farewell, and without a word of ever meeting again, they separated, both feeling, but neither saying, that unless unforeseen circumstances should bring them together, by their own wills they should meet never more again.

Ina and Elma, and his sister Lizzie, came down stairs to see Alfred off. Ina looked weary, but that was nothing new. It was Elma's pallor and careworn look that smote Alfred with a keen regret, and vain and bitter yearning. It was for Carlos, he knew, that she had wept and watched—for Carlos that anxiety and fear had half-broken her heart and paled her fresh blooming beauty! She would never so watch and weep and mourn for *him*!

He held her hand long as he bade her good-bye. For *he* knew this was a farewell indeed ; though she did not. He knew that whenever he saw her again she would be Carlos's wife. He knew that if ever she should hear the true story of the "accident" that was his work, she would judge him even more harshly than now in his own mind he deemed he merited.

If ever Carlos told her, and he might very probably tell her when she was his wife, thought Alfred, how she would shrink with hatred and horror from the touch of the hand, which now she pressed with a warm and friendly good-bye. For knowing, as she did, that he had manifested the greatest anxiety about Carlos's recovery, she felt very friendly towards him now. Her conscience pricked her always slightly, too, with the knowledge she alone possessed in her secret heart, that before Carlos came back, she had thought far more of Alfred, and even admitted in special privacy to her own self, the possibility of one day making up her mind to accept his hand if he offered it. She felt a little guilty towards him, because she knew that from the moment Carlos's blue eyes smiled into hers again, Alfred had fallen from the prominent place which he had occupied in her thoughts, though never in her heart. Partly from this feeling, partly from gratitude for his sympathy with her anxiety, her last look and word to him were friendly and sweet. He took away with him a memory of her parting smile.

"Let come what come may," he thought, "to-day she knows nothing, and to-day we have said good-bye!"

The two months during which Carlos was imprisoned in his room rolled slowly away. Before the second month was at its end, however, he had insisted on being allowed to rise, and, once risen, the united influence of the household was not enough to keep him

in his room. Sometimes he said it was worth while being on the sick-list to be so petted and spoiled. And truly if two affectionate and attentive aunts and an adoring fiancée, to say nothing of a staff of loyal retainers, be enough to spoil a young man, then was Carlos Atherdale spoilt! But he did not seem much the worse for it; he was grateful for their devotion, and although it was lavished upon him as a matter of course, he never made exacting demands upon it, nor ever distressed them by letting them know how much he suffered, when he could conceal it from their anxious eyes.

But the blow, although he was recovering from it, had sapped his strength. His once splendid and robust health was shattered, and might be patched and mended, but not fully restored. And two people knew this—the doctor and the patient. The injury that Dr. Haynes had “hoped might result in no permanent inconvenience” (and even while he had said it his fear belied his hope), had left its mark in a decided lameness, a slight but unmistakeable limp, which afforded no room for hope that it could ever be cured. Nor was this the worst. Dr. Haynes knew, and Carlos knew, that the effects of that nearly fatal fall could never pass entirely away, and that all his life he would be liable to returns of the suffering which he had already endured. His strength was broken, and between him and the bright sky of Life that had shone so fair above his head the ugly raven “Pain” flapped

her great black wings and obscured the sunlight, and croaked out forebodings and prophecies.

"I wish I'd broken all my limbs!" he observed one day, gloomily, as he leaned back in a great dark arm-chair in the library, his favourite room always.

"Carlos! what can you mean?" asked Elma in surprise, for it was the first time he had spoken despondingly to her.

"A broken limb can be set, and heal as strong as ever," he replied. "But my strength is gone from me for good—or for bad rather, it seems to me."

"Dearest, you are better—you are getting quite well?" said Elma, half assuringly and half interrogatively, looking at him with anxious scrutiny.

"Better—yes! Getting quite well—no! There was a rhyme of my childhood, Elma—I daresay it was a rhyme of yours too, though we were born and bred so many thousand miles apart—a rhyme setting forth how Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall. 'All the king's horses and all the king's men, Will never set Humpty-Dumpty up again.' I think that's about the case with my strength, Elma." She was sitting on a low cushioned foot-stool at his side, gazing up into his face with wistful anxiety. He smiled as he met her look, and smoothed a stray lock of her hair caressingly. "Pretty brown hair," he said. "Don't look sad, my beautiful brown eyes. Never cloud their brightness for me. But I've been thinking, Elma, that I ought not to let you be misled."

"How misled?" she asked, in the clear, full-toned voice that was always so soft and tender to him.

"I shall never be quite myself again, I fear. When I asked you to marry me, I was in splendid strength and health. I thought I would be guardian and protector and everything to you, and fight all your battles for you, and be sword and shield to keep you safe from any touch of trouble or care. But now I fear I should be a trouble and a care to you myself. I think, my Elma, if the fates deal as hardly with me as they may do, that you might have a brighter and a happier lot than to be my wife."

"A happier lot than to be with *you*?" she said with a thrill of passion in her low and loving tones. "Never, never, Carlos, never! There is no brightness on this earth for me apart from you."

"Is that so, my love? is that so indeed?" he whispered.

And then they talked no more of trouble or of care, and forgot all clouds in the future and the past.

Mrs. Edwin Atherdale quitted Saxby Towers about this time, having been, as she was glad to feel, a real help and comfort in the household during Carlos's illness. She was really fond of him, and had never felt angry with him except at that time when he had quarrelled with her dear son, and left her daughter with a brief and unsatisfactory farewell. For these sins, however, she had forgiven him, and had been a great support to Ina, whose health was very fragile, and to

Elma, who, between her lover and her sister, had been nearly distracted with anxiety.

During the months that Carlos had been a petted invalid surrounded with devotion, he had no idea how steadily Ina's health had been declining. As Elma had soothed her sister in the days when Carlos lay in real danger by making the best of things, and always seeming more hopeful than she really was, so she had kept from Carlos's sight her uneasiness about Ina. She had troubled neither by dwelling on her worst fears for the other. And Ina herself had bent over Carlos's pillow and hovered round him with half-maternal, half sisterly solicitude, and never uttered a complaint of her own indisposition, but patiently and slowly faded and wasted away week by week—so gradually that the decline was almost imperceptible, so calmly and uncomplainingly that only Elma and the doctor feared the truth.

On Carlos it dawned at last, although his masculine leisuress of comprehension did not realise it very speedily, that Ina was really ill; then he noticed Elma's watchfulness of her, and saw that she too was aware of the critical state of her sister's health. While he was growing stronger, though never with the strength he had exulted in before—while he was taking longer and longer walks, though always now with a slow and uneven and slightly halting gait, and never again with the free step of old—while he was daily gaining a grain of vital force, Ina was as daily losing.

The tide was ebbing slowly, but always steadily and changelessly ebbing.

Carlos and Elma talked at first of fixing their marriage-day "when Ina grew strong." But they ceased now to speak of this, and talked instead, of having a quiet wedding, and taking Ina with them to winter in Italy. It was Ina herself who first broached the subject plainly to Elma.

"When will you and Carlos be married, dear?"

"I don't know exactly. Before the cold weather comes on. We do not care to winter here, and we are going to carry you off to Nice or Naples, you know."

"No, Elma dearest; I will not go with you to cloud your wedding-journey."

"It would be more clouded without you. I should always be anxious, thinking of you."

"I should like to see you married to him," continued Ina musingly. "Then I should feel I left my little sister safe and sheltered. And you will take care of him; for he needs care now. He is still not strong."

"I know it—I know it!" replied Elma gravely. "But I am strong; and I can take care of you both. We will all three be together; and I will watch over both my darlings, and cherish them so carefully."

"No, no, dear Elma; you must go to Italy with Carlos alone, and devote yourself to him. Change and travelling would do *me* no good. I don't think it

would even delay the end or keep me any longer with you."

"Ina dear, do not talk so," said Elma deprecatingly. "Think how many people have derived the greatest benefit from change of air."

"But not in my case would change do any good. That is one thing. Another is that you and Carlos at the outset of your life together must not be burthened by a nervous sinking invalid companion. Another still is, her voice softened and sunk lower 'that I want—if Carlos will let me—to stay *here*, where Geoffrey died!'"

"You shall do whatever you like, as you know well. We have time yet to decide ; it is still only September. The end of October, just a month hence, will be time enough to leave. Anyhow, whether you go abroad with us or stay here, it is with us still. I would not leave you, Ina. My darling, you must get well ; you will try to get well for my sake?"

"Dear Elma, I might try in vain. It is not in my hands. I do not think it will be very long before my name is called. But God knows. And I shall be ready."

"Oh, Ina ! Ina, dearest, I have only you and Carlos in all the world !"

"You will have Carlos still, dear. Parting from you will be all I regret. But I leave *you* with Carlos ; and *I* go to Geoffrey. And so you see,

'Our lot is well divided!'"

"Yes, that is true," murmured Elma, clinging to her sister lovingly. "The world where Carlos is, cannot be all dark to me! And the world where Geoffrey is must be bright to you."

"It is! it is," whispered Ina earnestly, with a rapt and peaceful look upon her face.

The days wore away. Carlos and Elma deliberated whether they should be quickly and quietly married, and then use all their influence to persuade Ina to accompany them to a southern climate, or whether they should wait and see "how she got on," or whether they should marry and stay with her.

"Let us be married soon, anyhow," he proposed. "We'll go or stay just according as Ina's strength allows. I wouldn't leave her alone now of course, on any account. We'll pull her through to health again if we can; and if not, we'll do our best to make her happy the time she is left with us. But I want you to be all my own, Elma. Say, will you let me fix it up about the license right away, and will you be ready?"

"If you wish it," she consented somewhat shyly, laying her cheek against his shoulder.

"I do wish it. But don't *you*?" he persisted, manœuvring to draw forth more protestations of devotion, a purpose which Elma frustrated for the moment.

"I won't be led into saying so many sweet things to you," she said with a pretty wilfulness. Then she

smiled softly and looked up frankly into his eyes as she added, "But whatever pleases you pleases me, and that's the truth! So settle it as you like, dear Carlos. Issue your orders, and I will be ready."

"To-morrow?" he suggested, taking her literally at her word.

"Well, dear, not quite so suddenly. What would people say?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," he replied.

Still the day they fixed upon was several morrows off; as of course it was well that the household and neighbourhood should not be startled and set gaping and gossiping by a wedding of twelve hours' notice. However, before the fixed day arrived, Ina became very much worse, and Dr. Haynes was again a constant attendant at Saxby Towers. She did not keep her bed, but each day came downstairs later and later, with feebler and feebler step, with sadder, dimmer, hollower eyes. Always uncomplaining and gentle, even when suffering, she used to lie silently on her sofa drawn near the window, and look out with wistful patient gaze.

"Does it do her harm to dress and come downstairs?" asked Elma anxiously.

"If she wishes it, let her do it. I would not cross her wishes unnecessarily now," replied Dr. Haynes gravely.

It was two evenings before the day appointed for

the marriage that they were sitting in the large drawing-room of Saxby Towers. Ina's fragile wasted figure was sunk and half buried among the cushions of her couch, by the window as usual. Carlos, at the other side of the room, was reading his latest batch of American newspapers, comfortably occupying two chairs at once according to the habits of the land of his birth. Elma sat keeping a tender guard over her sister, with many a quiet glance across the room at her lover.

"What is it you say, dear?" she asked, hearing Ina murmuring something to herself.

"In another world," the weak voice murmured dreamily. "Those words of my Geoffrey are haunting me this evening. It was on the last night of his life that he said so often—over and over again—'Another world, Ina. In another world.' I keep these words in my heart."

Elma pressed her hand sympathetically, and stifled a sigh as she looked down on the fair wan faded face. Speaking tired Ina, so they did not talk. She was lying quietly, her eyes closed in the prostration of utter weakness and weariness, when Carlos called Elma to his side, and gave her one of the newspapers, pointing her out an article which he thought would interest her, and smoothing her hair with his quiet caressing smile. She had perused about half a column of the close-printed "leader," when Ina coughed and moved restlessly. Elma looked up; and the next time that

a sigh and a stir came from the sofa, she crossed the room lightly to her sister's side.

"Are you suffering, dear?" she whispered very softly. Ina did not answer until Elma inquired again. Then she looked up with an only half-comprehending glance.

"I—I feel so strange," she said faintly, and made an effort to rise. Elma put her arm round her and supported her anxiously, more alarmed by her look than by her words. An indescribable shadow seemed to have fallen over her face, and her eyes wandered vaguely and strangely from Elma's gaze.

"Call Geoffrey—ask—Geoffrey—to come," she whispered, with seeming difficulty in utterance. Elma looked at Carlos appealingly, but did not need to call him, for he was by her side in a moment. Ina looked up at him from Elma's supporting arms, and the likeness between him and Geoffrey being now stronger than ever, it must have seemed to her fast-failing eyes, that Geoffrey himself stood there. She stretched her hands towards him with a new light upon her face; he bent down and moved Elma's arm back gently, and himself supported Ina. The ghost of a smile flickered over her pale lips, as with a faint whisper of "Geoffrey!" her head sank on his shoulder as if to a haven of rest.

Carlos motioned Elma away.

"Fetch a glass of water from the dining-room," he said, and Elma went.

When in a few moments she came back, Carlos met her at the drawing-room door. He took the glass from her and set it down, and laid his hand upon her arm. Although he did not speak, his look startled her more than any exclamation could have done. The blood froze still about her heart ; she stood paralysed, gazing into his face.

"Elma," he said in a voice, low and solemn, but shaken by emotion, "Be brave ! be prepared to bear it ! It is well with her ; they are together in another world now."





## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A SECRET OF THE DEAD.

I descend with my dead in the trenches ;  
To-night I bend down on the plain  
In the dark ; and a memory wrenches  
The soul ; I turn up to the rain  
The cold and the beautiful faces !  
Aye ! faces forbidden for years,  
Turn'd up to my face, with the traces  
Of blood to the white rain of tears !

—*Joaquin Miller.*



NA ATHERDALE'S death, although it could not have been called entirely unexpected, was a sudden and a terrible blow to Elma. She had ceased to entertain any real hope of her sister's recovery ; but she was in no way prepared for the shock to fall upon her so suddenly. Still for Carlos's sake she tried to bear up against the paroxysms of grief that almost over-mastered her.

"I have no one but you now ; no one and nothing but you in all the world !" she said over and over again to him ; and clung to him with a devotion, which, in its utter absorption and intensity and depth, made

him wish to be immortal for her sake. He thought sometimes with a troubled heart of the possibility of her being ever left utterly lonely; and even almost wished sometimes that she had elected to sail the stormy seas in company with a vessel less likely to go down if another hurricane should burst upon it.

Elma, of course, had no desire to leave the house that now held all on earth that was dear to her, the living and the dead. Nor would Carlos have consented to her quitting Saxby Towers on her sister's death. Therefore Mrs. Marsh, the clergyman's wife, kindly came to play propriety there, until Mrs. Atherdale, who had been telegraphed for, could arrive. She had been watching Dora's little boy through the whooping-cough, but came promptly to the Towers in time to follow her sister-in-law to the grave.

Alfred did not come. He wished the past to be the past, and at Saxby Towers he knew its ghost must walk.

They laid Ina Atherdale in the vault where Geoffrey and his parents slept. And by Elma's wish they ordered to be engraven on the marble,

"In their death they were not divided."

And in the same churchyard, a few graves distant, the grass had been growing for years wildly higher and higher over the neglected tomb of Viola Dalziel. Now directions were given for that grave to be cared for and tended; now the dust was brushed off the dead girl's memory, and people began to speak of her again, to

tell the story of her youth and beauty and her untimely death, and to remark on the strange way in which the lives of the three Dalziel sisters had been entwined with the Atherdale family. The subject began to interest the inhabitants of Saxby and its neighbourhood again, and the story was often related over, how that Geoffrey Atherdale and the two sisters, one of whom he had loved and lost, and the other of whom he had twenty years after married, were buried in the same churchyard, and that before that church altar were soon to stand the last of the Dalziels and the present owner of Saxby Towers.

For they had agreed only to postpone their marriage for a short time, and then be quietly and privately wed in the little church, and go away from Saxby, though whither they had not quite decided. They would not defer their union, for their love was too deep and earnest to jar upon the solemnity of recent death, or make discordance with the sorrow of present mourning. They two had waited and watched together, rejoiced, grieved, feared, and suffered together. In pure and perfect, faithful and devoted love they took each other now, deeming this love not inharmonious with sorrow, nor forgetful of the lost. For *she* was the hope and faith of his life, and *he* her comfort and her strength, her haven and her home.

Elma was in the library a day or two before their marriage, standing looking half absently over the range of portraits on the mantelpiece, when Carlos, who had

said he would join her there, came in. Through the sadness of her pale beautiful face, there dawned a tender smile, as he came to her side, and put his arm round her with his usual air of protecting proprietorship, and withal of assured tenderness. He glanced at the rank of framed portraits she had been regarding ; his eyes travelled from the large faded cabinet-photograph of Geoffrey to the polished and beautiful vignette of Ina's face, and then to the morocco-cased miniature of Viola Dalziel which had had its place there for a long time of late years.

"You are very like her," he observed thoughtfully, looking from Elma's living face to the lifeless picture of Viola. "How strange that you should bear such a resemblance to her, and I to uncle Geoffrey ! That never struck me before ! But it is strange—the two likenesses—is it not ?"

"The resemblances are natural enough ; but it *is* strange that we two should be together, as they two would have been."

"God forbid that there should be anything similar in the stories of *our* lives and theirs, although our looks may be alike !" he said very earnestly. "Sometimes I fancy I am wrong to take you, Elma ; but yet, when we have chosen each other out of all the world, it would be criminal weakness to let ourselves be parted by foolish fanciful doubts and fears. Still, before you take the irrevocable step and become my wife, I wish you to know—what I shall tell none but you. It

shall not make any difference between us, shall it, Elma?"

"What difference between *us*, *could* it make, whatever it may be?" she said. "I have often felt that you had secrets and reserves from me, Carlos. I trusted you so that I never wished to pry into them. But now I am very, very glad that you are going to trust me."

"They were not secrets of my own that I kept from you. Do you remember that hot words passed once here, between Alfred and me?"

"Yes, I remember all about it well."

"Do you recollect what suspicions he insinuated—with what implications he taunted me, because I had been constantly alone with my uncle, and because he knew me to be in possession of some paper I did not produce and would not talk about?"

"Yes, I know."

"And did you never think that my silence appeared strange, nor suspect me of any tampering with my uncle's papers, or underhanded influence upon himself?"

"Carlos! can you ask me? Had I not always—always, such faith in you as I have in Heaven itself? Could I doubt your honour or your truth? Impossible!"

"Others were not like you!" he said half tenderly, half moodily.

"And Ina trusted you as I did," continued Elma,

with a quiver of the lips as she spoke her sister's name.

"She was good and pure like you. And while she lived I never would have let this paper see the light. But now that she has gone, I have the right to show it to you, and you of all women have the right to see it." He took a paper from his breast-pocket—a folded paper sealed with red wax. Before he gave it to her, he said :

"Don't think too hard of Uncle Geoff, Elma. If he sinned, his life-long suffering atoned !—God rest his soul !"

"This is the paper he entrusted to you ?" she inquired.

"And I have kept my trust," he said. "I promised him that while Ina lived no one should ever see this paper, nor know the story it told. But now you may know it ; you have the right."

Elma opened the paper with hands that trembled a little. There was something sacred and solemn in the unfolding of these pages, wherein a secret of the dead had been written by a hand long cold in the grave. She drew nearer to Carlos, silently, and leaned against his shoulder as she read.

It was written in faded ink on a large sheet of foreign-looking paper. It was dated simply, Denver City, 1842, and began abruptly, without an introductory word.

"I keep my secret while I live. But there's danger

round me and my comrades in every day of this life. Bullet or bowie knife, or tomahawk, may put an end to any of us any hour. And when I die, any one may know who cares to know, that the crime of Viola Dalziel's death is on my head. They think it was the loss of her that drove me into self-exile in this wild border life. No! I was driven by my secret and my crime! They gave me credit at home for having tried to save her; they made me out heroic for my efforts; they called me her would-be rescuer who am her murderer. I endured *that*, and therefore I have some courage. Was ever mortal more inconsistent than I have been? I live a coward, afraid to confess the truth, afraid to disclose the secret of my sin. Yet I had the courage to bear the praise and sympathy of those who thought her death was accident.

"It is four years ago, and yet I cannot tell the story now. Only those who, with my nature, have had that part of my experience, can know on what a rack a woman, who wills to torture, can stretch a man who loves her as I loved in those days. It was a madness, that love, and the jealousy that grew from it and mingled with its very being was madness too. The savage southern passions of my mother's race were in me. *She* played upon them, and made them her amusement and experiment. If she had played at putting a match to a powder-mine, it would have been about as safe.

"She was fearless as a young tigress until the very last. She never thought, I fancy, that I could really harm her. Nor did I think so once. I did not know myself. So she maddened me with jealousy—talked of some absent fellow—I wish I had him here now! within shot! Yet, perhaps she drove *him* mad like *me*! But whoever he was, the curse was not for him; it was reserved for me. There must have been a devil possessing her on that last evening, when we walked to the old bridge. Curses on that bridge! I wish I could forget it. Every plank and nail of it is branded in my memory. Yes, it must have been a possessing demon that drove her to say the words she did to me—to look at me with that mocking triumph! Why did no angel warn her? Well, it was no accident. It was *my* act. My hand—this hand that writes—flung her down to her death in the cold river. I flung myself after her, true! If I had saved her—if! how my whole life's devotion should have sought to atone, if she would have let it be so, for that minute's insanity! But no! They dragged *me* back to life. I will write no more. Viola! my lost, my murdered love, you are well avenged! If you could read my heart, you would pity me, I think! This is the secret of my life. But I will not take it with me to the grave. My ghost would walk—I could not lie at peace—with this unconfessed sin on my soul. And in death at least I hope for peace."

Here the writing in the faded ink broke off, as abruptly as it had begun, except that the writer's signature was under the last line. But on the next page, in a still faded, but fresher and blacker ink, was written :

“ Twenty years since I wrote this confession—nearly as many since I have opened it. And now I open it to add these last words. I am going to marry the sister of the woman of whose death I am guilty. I am going to take her with me to the old home, which since it became accursed to me I have never seen, the place of my sin, the spot which of all spots else I have avoided. If my sin was a madness, this is madness too. But I am going to do it. I have taken the plunge and I abide by it. I commit myself blindfold to the tide. Let it take me where it will ! I shall marry Ina and let the deluge come ! She knows nothing of my unsuspected secret, and she shall never know. The fires of hell would be gentler to me than to see horror and recoiling in her eyes. She is pure as heaven, good as a saint. She trusts in me as if I too were a saint. And all the while I know I am a murderer, and a coward who dares not confess. How she would shrink in horror from my crime ! how she would despise and pity my cowardice ! I used to see her when she was a little child, a small frail dark-eyed child playing at her mother's feet. If only she were not that child ! if only she were any other man's daughter ! if only that blood did not run in her veins !

What malignant Fate threw her in my path? No good can come of it.

"I had thought I should live down the curse. I had lived through the first bitterness of remorse. I had come back to my own country with something of hope and pleasure. I was attaining to a sort of hollow peace; when I saw her. I had buried my skeleton deep down in my heart under the weight of many years. It was always, always there, but it lay buried deep—until *her* eyes looked through me and recalled those other eyes—her sister's, Viola's. Now I am never safe from my skeleton. In my happiest moments with her it rattles its bones between us. I fear it will never rest again! I see now that I shall never know peace in all my life. I can face that certainty. It is the price I pay for Ina. And when I die—will there be rest for the unquiet soul then? If ever she should know that I who have taken her love and her trust, am a coward whose hand caused a woman's death,—and that woman her sister!—I could not live under her eyes, nor rest even in the grave. If I had told her at first!—but it is too late now. Nothing shall take her from me in spite of all. And she shall never know how poor a coward she has trusted. Yet I keep my confession by me still. I could not die and leave the story untold. I could not tell it to any mortal ear. I keep this paper safe and secret. Only *she* shall never know of it. Cowardly to the end, I should not dare to die and risk the unrest after death of leaving

an unacknowledged sin, taking the burthen of a secret like mine with me; to hang like a millweight on my soul and hold me down to earth. Ina is wrong to trust me. But I will let her keep her faith. And God help us both !”





## CHAPTER XXVII.

### TOGETHER.

As then awhile, for ever now  
Together, I and he !

\* \* \*  
Right so the sunset skies unsealed—  
Like lands he never knew—  
Beyond to-morrow's battle-field  
Lay open out of view,  
To ride into !—*Rossetti.*

**I**N silence, without a word of comment or exclamation, Elma read the paper through to its end. In silence still she laid it down, and drew a deep and shuddering sigh. Carlos could not see her face ; her head had been leaning against his shoulder all the time she read, and rested there still downcast, so that he could not see what expression was in those eyes which always spoke so eloquently that there sometimes seemed but little need for the lips to frame any words at all.

“ Elma ? ” he said inquiringly, rather anxiously, after a short pause of waiting for her to speak.

"Well, Carlos?" in a very low quiet voice.

"Do you blame me for seeking you when I knew of this?"

"No," she said, her face still bent and hidden. "We only followed our Fates. But it is strange—strange!"

"It did seem to me sometimes like Fate," he rejoined, "that you and I should love each other. But then what use would there have been in resisting our fate? Elma, look up! Say, have I done wrong to claim you? Is *this* to make any difference between us?"

She raised her head then; her arms stole softly round his neck; her eyes glowed with a steady light of unchanged and unchangeable love as they gazed into his.

"No difference—none!" she answered him resolutely and tenderly. "Even if I foresaw that the whole story of the two lives of those whom we two so resemble—were to repeat itself in us—even if I knew her tragic end was surely awaiting me, it would make no difference! Whatever I had to suffer *for* you, and *with* you, I should still say, I am yours, all yours, only yours!"

"My true brave Elma! So I trusted, so I thought you would say! But have no fear. If one Atherdale caused the death of one Dalziel, it may be allotted that another Atherdale shall atone by making another Dalziel's life happy. This is what I have thought all

along. I have believed that it could not be for evil nor as a curse, that we, who have done no wrong, should be brought together ; but rather as a blessing to us both, a healing up and putting away for ever of the old sin and sorrow. I have trusted in my love for you and my power to make your life bright and peaceful. I did not fear to take you. But I have wondered sometimes whether any superstitious fancies or fears would draw *you* away from me, if you knew of this."

"Even if I felt any such fears or fancies, they would not part us. They might make me anxious and uneasy, but could never stand between me and you. As it is, I do not fear. And if misfortune does come upon us, Carlos, we will bear it together !"

She looked down upon the pages whereon Geoffrey's own hand had written his life's secret, and re-read a few words here and there, touching the paper carefully and reverently. She read from the last page in a solemn hushed voice :

"And when I die, will there be rest for the unquiet soul then ?"

"Ah, Carlos, I trust so, I hope so. I think he is with Ina now, at peace."

They were silent a moment ; an earnest longing and a far-away seeking were in Elma's uplifted eyes, and she breathed softly, as if unconsciously waiting. But no voice was in the silence ; no breath fanned their faces ; no sign was given to them to tell them

whether the unquiet spirit had found rest and peace at last.

"If Ina had known!" pondered Elma then. "I wonder, Carlos, how it would have been? It seems to me that *I* would be true to you through sin or shame--(if shame could touch you!) I cannot think but that Ina would have shared the sorrow, and mourned the sin, and braved the curse with him! And I think her angel soul has comforted him now! Still I am glad that while she lived she never knew it. And we will keep this story sacred in our own hearts, Carlos. It is a sad, sad story. If only he had had courage to own the truth, how strangely different would everything have been! Had *you* ever suspected this before? or was it only when he knew that he should die, that he let you know?"

"Only then. I do not think his spirit could have passed without his having shared that secret with somebody?"

"And he could not bear that she should ever know!" reflected Elma in a quivering voice, thinking how Ina had died in peace and trust and unsuspecting utter faith.

"No; that was the one thought that haunted him. It was about that he was always speaking. '*She* might think hard of me,' he would say. '*She* would be sorry she ever loved me. Our union would seem an unholy one to her.' So he trusted me with the

secret he could not take with him untold ; and trusted me to keep it safely from her."

"And well you have kept your trust, my darling!" Elma said. "I always knew the motto of your life would be truly 'Sans peur et sans reproche!' My own—my brave, true, loyal heart! Could anything earthly stand between us?"

A shade of sadness clouded his brow as he bent his head and kissed the gold-brown locks of hair that strayed over her forehead.

"Don't love me too much, Elma, in case I should have to leave you."

"Leave me! *You* leave me?"

"Not of my own will, dearest; be sure of that. But I have ugly symptoms now and then that remind me I don't hold my life on a ninety-nine years' lease. I don't know that a fellow isn't luckier if he dies off sharp than if he takes a deal of killing."

"*Don't*, Carlos!" said Elma, with a look of alarm and pain, clutching his hand tightly.

"Well, I think I should take a good deal of killing, Elma; there's a comfort for you? or is it the reverse? You would not like to have an invalid on your hands?"

"I should not like you to suffer; but it would be a consolation to feel that you *needed me*—that I was something to you!"

"You are that, as you know well. Nearer *every-*

*thing*, I think. And while we're on this subject I have something more yet to say to you."

This next subject turned out to be the important question of, Where should they go? They were to leave Saxby Towers directly after their marriage; that was arranged; but whither they were to betake their steps, was not yet arranged. Now on this question, Carlos had a suggestion to make—a suggestion on the carrying out of which he had somewhat suddenly set his heart, but which he presented to Elma as a mere notion of his, for her to encourage or crush by a word, as she chose. She looked through and through his transparent pretence of "all the same to me" indifference, and saw it was a cherished plan that he was laying before her—a plan conceived with characteristic suddenness and energy, but cherished nevertheless. It was, that instead of quitting Saxby for a given season, whether the conventional honeymoon or the equally ordinary winter in Italy, they should turn their backs on it for an indefinite time, and take flight across the Atlantic.

The first time that he had resolved to settle at Saxby Towers, as he said, the place had been rendered hateful to him by the creeping slanders bred by his cousin's jealousy, which had driven him away. When he had returned, and had a second time thought to try the experiment of settling down and making the Towers his home, his own severe illness and Ina's death had filled the place again with melancholy

associations. The house seemed peopled only with ghosts of the past now to both Carlos and Elma. Furthermore, in both their hearts there lurked a secret superstitious feeling—which was perhaps under the circumstances not unnatural—that the place was “unlucky,” especially to any union between their two families. It was the scene of all the most tragic parts of Geoffrey’s life; his sad story had begun there and ended there. The very atmosphere seemed now to Elma dangerous, although she would not acknowledge it. She listened with no demur, with a light of eager interest in her eyes—the first that had shone there since her sister’s death—to Carlos’s descriptions of the life, manners, and customs, the glories of Nature and beauties of climate, in that vast continent which was his earliest home, and all appertaining to which he painted in glowing colours.

There was no one in England now whom Elma would regret to leave. Wherever Carlos was, would be home to her. Across the channel or over the Atlantic, it mattered not. Besides, she was anxious about his still shattered strength, with the all-absorbing anxiety that only a woman who loves, and has no tie nor bond nor kindred nor interest in all the world save the one object of her love, can know. If ocean breezes and the climate of his boyhood would be good for him, she would willingly have ventured on the Atlantic voyage in a canoe, if no other vessel were available.

“But—so soon?” she queried rather doubtfully, as

he unfolded his plans for leaving the Towers directly they were married and catching the Scotia at Liverpool.

"Why not?" he said, the grand consideration that always takes possession of a woman's mind when a journey is suddenly decided upon, never entering his brain. "What have we got to stay for?"

"My dresses, and things. And my boxes are none of them large enough. What must I take?" Elma looked at him in perfectly helpless appeal.

"Just as little as you can. There's plenty of stores in New York, where you can get whatever you want."

This satisfactory re-assurance settled the question. Before the next day was over they had made all their arrangements for an immediate voyage; and a letter to the family lawyer announced that Saxby Towers would be "To Let" again.

The evening before their wedding, Carlos and Elma took a farewell walk about the neighbourhood, and wound up with a pilgrimage to the old churchyard. It was a mild early autumn evening, and they lingered there amongst the graves at their feet, the golden autumn-leaved trees sighing softly over their heads. Elma was pale and sad-eyed, and Carlos thoughtful, and both rather silent; but there was no doubt nor despair nor discontent in the souls of either; only they were brimming with deep mutual love, and hopes more earnest than bright, and regrets that were rather solemn than bitter.

"Here is the beginning of the sad strange story

that touches us so nearly," observed Elma, in a low and tremulous voice, indicating the grave of Viola Dalziel, where now the wild grass was trimmed and a wreath of autumn flowers hung.

"And there is its end," said Carlos, turning towards the marble slab inscribed sacred to the memory of Geoffrey Atherdale, and—in newer, blacker letters—of Ina his wife. "The story is ended, Elma, and the last of it buried there. We two begin a new story for ourselves to-morrow."

He was looking at her, but she was looking at her sister's simple epitaph; her eyes were sad, and she did not glance up and smile as he spoke. He laid his hand upon her arm.

"You are not afraid of the future, Elma?" he said, with some suppressed anxiety. "Tell me—here, and now, that there is no secret fear nor superstitious reluctance warning you not to trust all your future life to me?"

"No," she answered solemnly, gazing at him now with tender loyal faith. "I link my life with yours, with no misgiving and with no mistrust. There is *no* inner voice whispering warnings to me, not even here."

"True and trustful love!" he said in the low soft accent she knew so well, an accent of the rare and lingering gentleness which seemed peculiar to him, and which a purely English voice very seldom possesses.

"May be we shall come back," he continued.

"But may be we shall see the sunset from this spot no more. Would that grieve you much?"

"No, not now. It seems to me now that all this place is of evil omen to us two. I shall be glad to leave it behind. The very atmosphere seems full of fatality. It drew your uncle back here to die."

"And it nearly was the death of me," observed Carlos; whereon Elma shuddered and sighed, as if the past danger by mere allusion to it could become the present, and clung closer to his arm. He stood thoughtfully, reflecting that it really appeared as if homicidal propensities must be innately strong in the Atherdales, to judge from the examples of his uncle and cousin. Would the family violence of uncontrollable fury ever break out in himself, he wondered? It did not seem likely; he had those examples to warn him; he had a nature more prone to love than hate, to trust than jealousy, to pardon than to revenge.

Elma might safely trust her life and her future to him.

He looked across the fields to the farthest line of landscape. In the evening breeze the autumn leaves fell like a soft rustling rain upon the ground; the swaying branches flaunted the autumn colours that clung about them, the waving standards of the season. The sun of the year was setting in rich russet and gold upon the trees; the sun of the day was going down in glowing gold and crimson on the horizon. The landscape sloped away downward from the little churchyard on the hill, in undulations of knoll and valley,

of wood and field. A faint warm haze half veiled the most distant meadows ; and all along the horizon the rosy banners of burnished cloud floated far and free.

"Look yonder, Elma !" he said. "This place is not good for us two. Even *I* am superstitious enough to fancy that there is some fatality in it. But look away to my glorious West ! Brighter scenes are awaiting us there. See how bright a promise the forecast of them is ! We leave this gloom behind us ; we go to a purer air, a freer, larger life ; and we go together !"

"Her eyes, as she looked at him, caught the grave brightness and the trustful hope from his.

"Together !" she said, and smiled.

The long evening shadows of the tall tombstones lay across their feet ; the churchyard yew-trees sighed above their heads. Clad all in mourning, in the very shadow of the graves, they stood united, trustful, hand clasped in hand, eyes gazing into eyes, with all-braving, all-enduring, and all-hoping love.

Shall the Fate that in their hearts they fear follow these two to the far country which they seek ? Shall the Love that has led them together lead them on through weal or woe ?

They know not ; only they are brave to dare, and strong to endure, together !

THE END.

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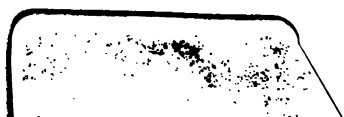
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